

**National Cursillo Movement**

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**EVANGELIZATION THROUGH CONVERSION[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**Introduction**

When we discuss "Evangelization" in the context of Cursillo, we are not just spreading the “Good News” of the Gospel. Instead, we strive to empower individuals to embody the Good News—this joyful message that Christ is alive among His people today, just as He was over 2,000 years ago.

The original vision and mission of Cursillo was to discover the most effective way to promote conversion, guiding individuals from their current state to their potential, from mere existence to a full life, in harmony with their identity and dignity as beloved children of God.

# Cursillo is a Channel to Conversion

The average person today may live according to Gospel values but may be distant from Christ because they don’t have a personal relationship with Him. Our original conviction stemmed from the idea that helping each person connect with Christ personally would be the key to unlocking their fullest potential. We believed the Cursillo method could achieve this goal, or at least begin the process, by making individuals realize that what they were seeking was precisely what Christ was offering.

Our approach was to rely on two strategies. The first is to remember that the Holy Spirit did not need three days to perform miracles. He has two days, twenty-three hours, fifty-nine minutes, and fifty-nine seconds more than He needs. This demonstrates the practical wisdom of the Gospel. The second strategy is to explain it enthusiastically and in a common-sense manner. As a brilliant saying goes, “A Christian is not something you are but something you are becoming.”

Conversion is not an event that suddenly happens but rather a process that unfolds through a series of stages. These stages include searching and encountering, and then a series of steps through which the "encounter" becomes real, resulting in a personal relationship with Christ and our brothers and sisters.

# Conversion is an Encounter Rather Than a Change

We believe that rather than focusing on deep theological teachings, the key to making the Good News accessible to the average person in their search for happiness, friendship, and love is to facilitate three essential encounters: with Self, Christ, and Others.

Whenever someone talks about conversion, it's important to understand that it is simply discovering the true meaning of our life as beloved children of God. Conversion means change or transformation, which can be difficult for some and positive for others.

St. Paul describes the fullness of conversion. He calls it “metanoia,” a process that includes both the death of the “Old Man” and the birth of the “New Man.” Ephesians 4:22-24 says, “Put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

Today, it is possible for a person to experience something that can significantly change their life for the better. This "something" is a "SOMEBODY" - JESUS CHRIST - who, through love and friendship, enables us to have a real encounter with Him within ourselves and with others.

There are still people who insist on speaking about conversion as a radical change, like death and the idea of "repentance" in the Old Testament. Some people smile with the conviction from the words in the New Testament: "Seek and you will find."

Similarly, as Christians, we have often mistakenly equated “value” with “price” by trying to persuade the “distant” or “faraway” person to come closer to us by emphasizing only the sacrifices they will have to make.

When we undergo a conversion, it changes our faith and how we perceive and practice it. However, it may not necessarily lead to a complete change in our values and behavior. Instead, it is more about striving to become a more fully realized version of ourselves rather than a completely different person.

# Stages of the Conversion Process

The “Cursillos in Christianity” method is based on a simple conviction and approaches the person's conversion in three distinct phases: Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo.

During the Precursillo phase, we aim to identify and befriend the person searching for happiness, fulfillment, or ideal found in Christ. We aim to accelerate and broaden their search by guiding them to three essential encounters: with themselves, Christ, and others. By doing this, we aim to channel his often-suppressed restlessness and make it the driving force for his new-found genuine and hopeful transformation.

During the 3-Day Cursillo, we aim to identify this inner unrest by facilitating the three essential encounters. Even if successful, we should not think that this person is now a “Christian” and that the job is done. All we can say is that the person has initiated the conversion process. According to the authentic method, the three days instill hunger and provide the method he can use to feed this ever-growing hunger. The friendship and relationship with himself, Christ, and others are ongoing and sustained in friendship throughout his Fourth Day, which lasts the rest of his life.

We can say that on the “3-Day Cursillo,” the person converted himself to Christ. We know that it is during the adventure of his Fourth Day that he will come to perfect this conversion and strive to become a Christian—to become Christ in the world where God has placed him.

In Mallorca, a Cursillista asked Father Juan Capo many years ago, "What does 'metanoia' mean?" "Metanoia," he said, "is like turning a sock inside out. In truth, it is the same sock with the same color and holes.”

The Postcursillo is centered on this simple truth: it recognizes a person’s unique identity while emphasizing the importance of remaining true to oneself.

Cursillo is one way that, with God’s grace, makes it possible for the “distant” or “faraway” person to be converted to Christ while allowing them to remain true to themselves and their surroundings. It enables them to see things in a new light.

Unfortunately, some leaders with good intentions are often tempted to change the ways, style, values, and even the environments of new Cursillistas in a misguided attempt to make them "fit in." Some people would rather have a world full of "people of the Church," but in Cursillo, we prefer a "Church of people" who are fully alive and active Christians. Everyone should be themselves, with freedom, creativity, and the constancy that God's grace always makes possible.

We all sing the De Colores song joyfully, celebrating the beauty of different colors. However, some misguided leaders, through their words and actions, seek to make everyone the same color — their color — and insist on a single path to get there — their way!

# Postcursillo, An Essential Stage of the Conversion Process

The Postcursillo phase is designed to help nurture and deepen the three essential encounters in the Cursillo experience. The most crucial aspect of this friendship-building process is the last encounter — friendship with the “others” that encompasses “everyone,” but particularly those closely involved in our conversion, such as those in our Group Reunion and Ultreya.

# Friendship: the Key to the Postcursillo

We “discover” ourselves by “relating to” and “comparing” ourselves with “others.” It is difficult to maintain a cheerful acceptance of self while being driven to demand self-improvement and perfection, which is the consequence of true friendship. We must see ourselves reflected in our friend’s “strengths” and “weaknesses”.

This natural desire for personal growth and development thrives best in a nurturing environment of genuine friendship rather than the typical competitive and impersonal world of mere acquaintances.

These two essential elements of personal growth — self-acceptance and personal development — are not enough to help the person reach their true potential. To achieve this, a third element is needed to complete, define, and guide our lives.

When two people become friends and share the belief that Christ gives meaning to their lives, past, present, and future, a new transcendent dimension is reached. This leads to a conscious and growing awareness of their integration with Christ, which becomes a natural and inevitable part of their self-identity.

This third and essential element of friendship can only come from sharing our Christian life with Christians. When friendship is born, lived, and nurtured — this third dimension — the active integration into the “whole” occurs, and the Kingdom of God is revealed, even if only a fragment.

It is this reality that allows a person to find and orient the direction of their life. Not only are they “essential,” but they also come to know who they truly are in relation to other things and people.

The person realizes his identity as a child of God and the totality and awesomeness of this reality. This realization compels and propels them on their journey of conversion and reinforces their courage to “stay the course.”

Upon understanding his identity, the person realizes that his life is not merely a result of chance. He can influence his environment naturally. He views problems as opportunities for growth and development. Although he may stumble and fail sometimes, he finds strength in sharing his life with friends who share his beliefs and values. He understands that his friends, whom he loves and admires, face challenges and make mistakes.

This is why the Postcursillo methodology was developed from the beginning and continues to be embraced by many Cursillistas today.

# Facilitating Friendship

Forming and building friendships is at the core of the Cursillo method.

Every aspect of the Precursillo, 3-Day Cursillo, and Postcursillo provides the opportunity to make friends and be friends with one another. While it is true that the 3-Day Cursillo facilitates friendships, it is the exposure of the Cursillistas to the larger community at the Closing that gets the Cursillistas thinking in terms of the possibilities for friendship. It gives them a foretaste of what lies ahead. This foretaste, coupled with the support of their sponsors and the invitation by the team for them to form their Group Reunion and attend the Ultreya, moves the process forward in the most effective way.

In the “witnessing” environment of Ultreya, those who have just started their conversion process meet and develop friendships with others already on the journey. It is important to keep the “floating” Group Reunion an essential part of Ultreya and ensure its composition varies instead of grouping with the same people.

It is important to the Cursillo method that the Ultreya remains primarily a meeting place where Cursillistas can make new friends of the type that will support, strengthen, and sustain the conversion process and all its unsuspected blessings.

# Group Reunion

We understand that there are two basic types of friendships: one-on-one and group friendships. The Postcursillo is both a movement and a method that acknowledges the value of one-on-one friendships. However, it also recognizes the potential dangers of relying solely on these friendships to sustain the conversion process. When limited to one-on-one relationships, there is a risk of getting sidetracked or stagnated.

It is important to emphasize the value of Group Reunion, friendship cultivated through regular group reunions of three to six people. While some individuals within the group may naturally form closer bonds with each other, this is completely normal and beneficial.

# Characteristics of the Group Reunion

1. *Plurality*

Because of their size, a group of three to six Cursillistas ensures wholesomeness, openness, equality, and vitality. The Group Reunion's need and key role in the Postcursillo are crucial.

1. *No Hidden Agenda*

In Cursillo, the group does not gather “to do” but “to be.” It does not aim for its members to have the same opinions on any subject, nor does it seek people from the same walks of life or with similar feelings or reactions to anything that happens.

The aim and purpose of the Group is to allow the members to come together to share what they have experienced individually throughout the week. The intent is to share what is being lived. Each member shares freely and accepts his gifts and uniqueness. This sharing enriches the Group and makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Considering that they are all in the conversion process but also “friends,” their individual and shared experiences make the entire process real, effective, attractive, joyful, and efficient.

1. *Respect and Dignity*

It is important that when one member is sharing their experiences or plans, others should not be dogmatic (narrow-minded, inflexible), instructional, or argumentative. In the Cursillo Group Reunion methodology, respect means we are constantly growing in our Christian faith and growing in “becoming” Christian. We should follow simple guidelines on Group Reunion etiquette, which urges us to refrain from judging or commenting on our friends’ shared experiences. Instead, we should accept their experiences and combine them with our own rather than using our experiences to undermine theirs.

1. *Stability*

Every Group Reunion must maintain stability and consistency by following the “order of reunion” in the Pilgrim’s Guide and staying connected to the Ultreya. This ensures that if the Group is not a good fit for its members or if circumstances change, they can connect with new friends or a new group.

1. *Freedom*

The Cursillo methodology aims to help maintain and nurture Christian life in the chaotic world we live in. It encourages Cursillistas to focus on doing what the Lord wants instead of simply doing as they please. Cursillo provides a simple and effective way to journey in the company of friends as we share the joys and challenges of life.

The purpose of Cursillo is to help and effectively support the conversion process. This process focuses on the three key encounters: with oneself, Christ, and others. These encounters are not limited to the "three days" of the Cursillo but continue during the Postcursillo phase. What is essential is for people to live in friendship and share the journey with others who are in the conversion process of “becoming Christian.”

Our experience has shown us that simply “knowing” or “serving” does not necessarily mean or lead to “loving” others. However, we do believe that “loving” does lead to “knowing” and “serving” others. There is no better way to promote “love” in this modern age than by combining the love of human friendships with the transcendence of God’s love, manifested in, and fostered by friends who are also in the process of and committed to becoming Christians.

# The Ultreya

The Ultreya is the Reunion of the Group Reunions. The purpose of Ultreya is for the Groups and their members to come together and share their experiences, not to acquire knowledge or receive instructions.

Since the beginning of Cursillo, Ultreya has allowed everyone to share their experiences and sustain and motivate the pilgrim mentality of conversion. The “floating” Group Reunions must be spontaneous, not controlled or orchestrated.

Unfortunately, some Cursillistas insist on using Ultreya as a place for studying or organized activities in addition to sharing experiences. When this happens, even with good intentions, the focus shifts away from the conversion process until the entire focus changes from that of “being” and “becoming” Christian to that of “doing” Christian things. If Ultreya stops being an instrument of conversion and becomes a place for learning, it will inevitably lose members.

The genuine Ultreya is one of the few places and occasions where a person in the conversion process can truly see they can be the “best” without being “better” than the others. This unique and evangelical sensation can only be attained by those who become fully human and fully alive Christians.

# Supporting Structures: School of Leaders and Secretariat

The primary and essential role of the School of Leaders is to support the Ultreya in their area. The leaders are living witnesses of what was said in the 3-Day Cursillo. Additionally, the School of Leaders is responsible for training the team for the 3-Day Cursillo, organizing and staffing the Secretariat, and providing the necessary Palanca for every Cursillo.

The School of Leaders is a gathering of Cursillistas interested in the Movement and its method. Its goal is to serve as a "nucleus of reflection" on the essence, purpose, and methodology of Cursillo and what it could or should be across all phases of the method: Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo.

To support this and facilitate the Movement’s functioning, the School of Leaders should nominate from its members those capable of carrying out the different tasks to form the Secretariat group. This group takes care of the material needs and organization. The least important tasks are as essential and necessary as the most important ones.

# Influencing the World Through Our Environments

# Of all the basic dimensions of the conversion process, we will focus on the one that is perhaps the most difficult to grasp and the most often misunderstood: “the influence of the Cursillistas in their natural environments.”

Cursillistas are encouraged to share their faith within their existing environments rather than trying to reach out to new environments. The goal is to influence their natural surroundings through friendship and setting a positive example. God has intentionally placed each of us in our own unique environments where we can influence others.

We must understand the difference between an “environment” and a “structure or organization.” Some people believe that if we change the leaders of human “structures” or “organizations,” then the entire structure or organization will be changed. However, we believe that the key to converting structures lies in converting the people within them who have the most “friendship” relations, as this naturally provides the maximum opportunities for influence. These people may not always be the leaders of the structures and organizations.

Therefore, when Cursillo refers to the “environment,” it aims to change; it does not mean the structure or organizations but rather the people within them.

By cultivating and nurturing genuine interpersonal relationships and friendships in all our environments, we create a Christian backbone to move the Precursillo of today to the Postcursillo of tomorrow, when everything will be restored to Christ. The Kingdom of God already among us will be revealed through friendship and love in all its glory.

We do not claim to have any formulas to alter the course of history. Still, we have the conviction, desire, and determination to shape today and tomorrow into a history of friendship and love. In doing so, we uphold the greatest commandment of all: "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself.”

# In Summary

In summary, what I've [Bonnin] shared with you is the simplest, most effective, and universal method for inspiring, encouraging, and supporting both men and women in their journey to become fully human and fully Christian. This is achieved through a lifelong process of personal transformation (or spiritual growth), which involves developing a deeper awareness of their identity as children of God. The goal is for Cursillistas to imitate Christ so they can become the person that He created them to be.

Understanding conversion as a process rather than a one-time event occurs through deepening one's relationship with Christ, supported by friends who encourage the inner Christ within each of us through friendship, which is considered the best way of evangelizing.

1. This is an abbreviated copy of the rollo, “Evangelization Through Conversion,” that Eduardo Bonnín presented to the Cursillistas in Canada in 1992. For a copy of the rollo in its entirety, visit [www.natl-cursillo.org](http://www.natl-cursillo.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)