



To Show People Jesus:
Living the Cursillo
Outside the Weekend

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Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of Your love.
Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever enjoy His consolations,
Through Christ Our Lord,
Amen.

Dear friends, my name is Allan Forsberg. I lived my Cursillo here in Grande Prairie, Ab, in the fall of 1998, and I sat at the table of St. Matthew. My wife, Mindy, and I live in Grande Prairie close to our two children and their partners. We are members of St. Joseph Parish and have been involved in the Cursillo Movement for over 20 years. Currently, I serve as the Western Representative in the National Leaders Group of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Cursillos, gathered here this week.

The pandemic period has changed many things. I read recently that psychiatrists and psychologists have noticed that the experience of the pandemic changed the personality of some people. People who were once social and gregarious are now more solitary and

introverted. Some avoid crowded gatherings altogether. I think the fact that the pandemic occurred in what might be called “The Age of Outrage” was also significant in changing the way people both perceive events and other phenomena and react to them. It seems like a significant number of people are outraged and protesting about a variety of issues these days.

Some are angry that lockdowns happened in the first place and seem not to be able to let it go and move forward. Some bought into conspiracy narratives and went down dark rabbit-holes. Many are alarmed that a war in Europe is even possible in the 21st Century when we all had come to think of ourselves as having progressed to some high watermark of civilization. All these things mean that we have had to tread carefully along life’s path. Thus, many people are no longer involved in community and church events as they once were. Some have not even resumed church attendance at all.

Certainly, it seems that the ZOOM platform has had a significant effect on the way we transmit and receive information, as well. It was a blessing in many ways, opening up communication that would not have happened otherwise after Covid 19 hit. It was also a burden for those of us that would have two or three ZOOM meetings in one day. One spoke of being “Zoomed out”. Zoom and YouTube certainly changed the worship habits of some Catholics

who began to prefer passively watching mass from the comfort of their living room couches, sipping coffee in their pyjamas.

And I get it...encountering the motley crowds of faithful attending church is not always pleasant. The body of Christ is, after all, like bodies everywhere, mired in an often messy physical reality. It has rarely been easy to love one's neighbour, or for them to love us. However, that is what Christ asks of us. Moreover, avoiding the body of Christ, not to mention not receiving the Eucharist regularly, is not an option for the faithful Catholic Christian.

However, during the pandemic many people stumbled upon the immense Catholic world that exists online. YouTube has been especially big in introducing many of us to Catholic speakers, lecturers and theologians with whom we had previously been unfamiliar.

One such YouTube channel was "Morning Prayer with the Very Reverend Robert Willis" Dean of Canterbury Cathedral. He became something of a media star among those believers seeking solace and wisdom during the pandemic period. It was charming and very consoling. Praying from his study, or the garden, or the Conservatory at the Cathedral, with two cats, his tea tray, and black cassock, he presented the very picture of an elderly man of God, his

wisdom and beautiful rich voice, bringing good news and comfort in a harsh time. One day in the Easter season he told us that the mission of Canterbury Cathedral is “To show people Jesus”. Think of that: to actually “show” people Jesus.

I put it to you, if the Christian life is an attempt to learn how to live as Jesus lived, love as Jesus loved, and do as Jesus did, then it involves just that: showing people Jesus, in other words, “evangelization”.

According to its normal meaning, already to be found in the Old Testament, the word “evangelization” expresses the idea of announcing a message of joy, for example upon the birth of a child or after victory in battle. In his preaching Jesus identifies himself with the messenger of expectant joy, announcing the return of the remnants of the Jewish people returning from Babylon.

In his person and in the signs he accomplishes, Jesus allows us to see brought to fulfillment the promise of God to give life to a new era in history, that of his kingdom. After him, the apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul and other disciples are identified as messengers who bear a proclamation of salvation and of joy. In a famous passage of the letter to the Romans, St. Paul quotes, from the passage from Isaiah and applies it to all Christians who proclaim the Gospel:

1"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rom 10:14–15).

The underlying significance of this quote helps us to understand our task as the new evangelists; we, the successors of the apostles, have a mission that is destined for the whole world, a world still trying to understand the implications and effects of the pandemic, not to mention the secularization of our culture. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel is directly identified with the person of Jesus, the messiah long awaited and now come into our midst. We hear (Acts 5:42): *"They preached every day in the temple and in private houses and their proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ was never interrupted"*. Our task, as Christians is to proclaim the good news of Jesus and, furthermore, to *show* people Jesus! In other words, to make Christ present in the world.

So where does our modern context leave evangelizing movements like Cursillo? As we come out of the pandemic period and regroup after a time when many of our evangelizing activities were foreclosed upon because of the dangers of Covid 19, it may serve us well to remind ourselves of the core purpose of the Cursillo

Movement: it is, in essence, an answer to that call from Christ to spread the good news of God's love in the world.

The founder of the Cursillo Movement, Eduardo Bonnin, along with his companions developed a way to do just that: **show people Jesus**. He wanted to find a way to take the reality of Christian life to new environments, those environments where people did not know Christ, had little religious experience and did not think of themselves as "Christian". He called those people the 'far away'. Eduardo felt that the ideal thing would be to find a way to interest people in the journey home to the Father, and to do it in such a way so as to ensure that the gospel message would reach those who did not know that the Father loved them. He wanted to help people encounter Jesus, but also to reflect deeply about their own lives, and to meet other people who had chosen to follow Christ. The outcome of those desires was the Cursillo Movement.

Eduardo's method was Friendship. Cursillo is an experience of friendship through communion with Christ and others. Eduardo and his companions studied the ordinary environments where they lived, relaxed and worked. They became friends with people in those environments, not in manipulative or contrived ways, but in real, authentic, meaningful ways just as Jesus would do. They tried

to see the people with the eyes of Jesus, respond as Jesus did, and love their new friends, as Jesus and the Apostles did.

When the time was right and the relationships had developed trust and good will they would suggest attending a Cursillo in which their new friends could encounter Christ, themselves and the Christian life as lived and modeled by their Christian friends. After the three days together, Eduardo and his companions continued to journey with the new Cursillistas through small groups and Ultreyas.

That is Cursillo. Cursillo is not a weekend; it is a journey, a life-long commitment to live the Christian life in all its fullness. It is evangelizing and changing environments so the Christian ideal may be realized. It is Grace at work in people so that they can live in Christ and Christ in them.

Cursillo does not begin with a weekend, and it does not end when the weekend is over. It is an ever-turning wheel where one person's post-Cursillo becomes another person's pre-Cursillo. Cursillo is always in motion as the ground is prepared for the next pilgrimage to the Three Encounters – with self, Christ and Others. Then the return home involves taking what was learned and experienced and using it to tend the soil so the new Christians can

continue to grow and evangelize others. The weekend simply becomes a deepening of the relationships with Christ and others so the work can happen with loyal and loving companions.

So, how do we actually show people Jesus? Let's reflect a bit about who Jesus was and how Jesus lived. What was Jesus like? I was a teacher for 40 years. Most of that time I worked as a primary teacher, teaching children to read. I would often ask those little ones to tell me about Jesus. Invariably they would say things like: "He is nice", or "He is kind", or "He is gentle and he loves us". The very picture of Jesus as a giant, cosmic teddy-bear. Sigh. But, it was a starting point, and I could begin to help them form a bigger picture of the real Jesus. He *was* merciful and compassionate, but he was much more.

Twice in the gospel of Mark we hear that the disciples travelling with him were "amazed and, as they followed, they were afraid (Mark 4:41 and 10:32). Afraid of Jesus? Well, yes. I mean he taught them, ate and drank with them, healed them, cared for them and loved them. But, at the same time he stopped the wind, calmed the sea, walked on water, fed 5000 with a bit of bread and some fish, and marched resolutely to his death in Jerusalem. He casts out demons, raises the dead, restores sight to the blind. Who does that? Clearly, he was more than a teddy-bear.

Jesus was, in fact, a deeply disturbing individual. He preached in such a way as to upset almost every accepted way of thinking in that time and place, and he continues to do that even today. Jesus was not afraid to disturb people, to do unexpected things and behave in counterintuitive ways.

Jesus was a man full of surprises. He said startling things. In Matthew chapter 5 he begins his ministry with the Beatitudes, themselves a challenge to the way most people think: the poor, the grieving, the meek, the persecuted are “blessed”. I don’t know if you have ever been poor, or grieving or persecuted, but I have and I certainly did not feel “blessed”. He continues his sermon on the mount by challenged many social conventions of the day: the laws about divorce, adultery, violence and murder. And, he tells us we will be judged by how well we love that previously mentioned motley crew: the body of Christ, those we call our neighbours.

Now, Jesus was a traditional Jewish man – he followed the tradition and respected the book of the law. But then he says, paraphrasing Matt. 5:17 “I came not to abolish the Law and the prophets, but to fulfill them”. In this context, to “fulfill the law and prophets”, the Very Reverend Robert Willis tells us, means the “Law is opened out by Jesus to flower and be even more fruitful” – but also to be lived more perfectly than they had been lived up to that

time. He calls people to live the laws more fully, more perfectly. It means to be brought into the broader framed reality that is the realm of the divine.

Recall Jesus saying, “be perfect as your father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). The Greek word translated as “perfect” is *teleios*, which also means “wholeness, fullness, completeness, finished, consummated, lacking nothing, full-grown”. In this context the word *wholeness* is deeply related to *holiness*. That which is holy is whole – there is no separation into parts, not conflicting bits, no parts missing. Holiness can be seen as the recreating of a person into wholeness – spirit, soul, and body. To be human is to be broken by sin and too often our attempts to live the spiritual life are only half-hearted. Jesus is calling us to whole-heartedness, wholeness, and holiness to live more fully in him – and to flower and to bear fruit”.

Today the Church is calling for a renewed missionary enthusiasm, in such a way as not to remain stuck in the past. That means we look for new ways and means to live more fully the Christian ideal, which is spread the gospel of Jesus in all its fullness, and not only preach it, but live the gospel: to actually show people Jesus.

Jesus seems to be calling us to live the Law in its fullness – not fractured or only doing part. Christians have a call to be holy...we are called to follow Jesus, to worship as he did, serve as he did, spread the gospel as he did, and love as he did. He was perfect, and we are not, that's true. However, we can follow and serve and love and worship more fully, more wholeheartedly, more full-grown, leaving nothing out.

So, too with Cursillo, we are called to ask ourselves, how can we live the fullness of the charism in all we do, all the time, not just on the weekend. How do we embrace people in all the fullness of friendship in their lives and environments, and not just on a weekend, not leaving anything out? How do we help them see that Christ is calling them to a transformation of heart and mind and life, not to simply a weekend experience of assorted emotional highs?

Which brings us to the question of “how do we love our neighbour”, or “how do we show our neighbour Jesus”? How do we love our friends, and even those we think of as enemies, in all the fullness, the wholeness that is Jesus? How do we live the Christian life more fully, in all our environments, all the time? Let's look at how it might look in all the stages of the Cursillo Movement.

So what would showing people Jesus actually look like in the pre-Cursillo period? First, we understand that we are *all* called to be evangelists. If we follow Jesus, we spread the gospel. In Cursillo terms, we look around the environments in which we work and play to see who is not at the table, who is missing, who has not heard the message. Then we befriend them and begin to lay the groundwork. We show them by our lives what it means to live in communion with Christ. We welcome them. We talk to them and listen to them, as friends do. We spend time with them. We share their lives.

Catholics are not good at evangelizing. Perhaps it conjures visions of TV evangelists collecting money. Maybe it has to do with an idea that a person's faith is "private". For the Christian, that idea is false. Christianity is "personal", but it is never private. Jesus said, "where two or three have come together in my name, I am there among them." (Matt. 18:20). We live Christianity in community.

However, one doesn't have to stand on street corners or go door to door to evangelize. We preach loudest when we live our Christian values openly and honestly, for all to see. In my own life, I did not really know the effect of simply living my life in Christ was having on those around me. We had just moved into a new house in Grande Prairie and I was excited about getting to know my neighbours. On one side of us were two working people in their early 60s. We met

them, and in talking they told us that they owned a large house on Sturgeon Lake where they gathered with their children and grandchildren most weekends, especially in summer. So, we rarely saw them.

In the front of our two houses we shared the lawn with no fence. So, when I mowed the lawn I mowed both sides; it didn't make sense to me to only cut half a lawn. I thought it would look terrible, and it didn't take much extra time or effort. But, one weekend my neighbour Rudy was home and when I was finished he came out the front door and walked over to me. He held out his hand and shook mine. "What church do you go to?" he asked? Surprised, I said, "St. Joseph Catholic Church". He said, "I knew you were a Christian man. Only a Christian man would mow his neighbour's lawn and ask nothing in return". We laughed, and he told me how he appreciated my efforts, and how overwhelmed he had been feeling trying to keep up two houses, and run a professional business. I really didn't think about how this simple act would be interpreted. But, I realized others are forming an opinion of us whether we know it or not. The question is: can they tell we are Christian by our behaviour?

On the other hand, we can miss opportunities to evangelize by being too timid. I came into the church in my early 40s through

RCIA. Soon after, I asked Sr. Helen, my spiritual director, how I could bring my extended family into the church. “Be very careful, very gentle,” she warned, “we can drive people in our family away by coming on too strong. It is best to use example”. I never forgot her advice, but may have applied it too rigidly.

A number of years ago, one of my nephews fell on hard times. He ended up homeless and came to live with Mindy and me. Because he was in his mid-thirties, and had no religion in his upbringing, I didn't speak openly to him about God or the church or religion. I guess I thought he wouldn't be interested.

About a month after he came to live with us he asked if we would mind if he came to church with us. I was astounded. I apologized for not having invited him and told him I hadn't because I didn't want him to think he was expected to come to church because now he was living with his religious old aunt and uncle. After mass that day, he said, “*You know I think I need this in my life*”. I was like, “*We all need this*”. Several weeks later, he said, “*You know, it is odd, but I feel better after mass*”. I was like, “*Me, too! That is why I keep coming!*”

I'm glad to report that he entered RCIA and was baptized at the Easter Vigil the next year. He has attended two Cursillo weekends,

joined a Reunion group, and the Knights of Columbus, since then. And, though his life is still a bit unsettled, he is living independently in a good housing situation and has re-established a positive relationship with his two daughters. God is good.

In these two examples, showing people Jesus meant simply being more Christ-like in daily living. There is nothing extraordinary about that. In these cases, it meant serving others without expectation of a return of favour, and simple accompaniment into the mystery that God,.

In both cases, I was simply going about life in an unconscious manner. Evangelists, on the other hand, try to be on the lookout for opportunities to bring Christ into the picture. These days I try to be more aware and conscious of the environments in which I exist and look for opportunities. That is pre-Cursillo.

What does it look like to show people Jesus on the Cursillo Weekend? Well, in order for the three encounters to happen – the encounter with self, with Jesus and with others – we must honestly believe that Christ has called the candidates and team, that He has gone before us and prepared the soil (in the pre-Cursillo), and that He will work through us as we model ourselves after him (even though we will never actually reach that ideal).

Then we create a Spirit-filled environment where Christ can come – in the form of the team who are filled with joy, are patient and action oriented, who interact with all in creative and flexible ways that develop deep friendships. We worship, praise, read scripture and model a life of prayer, of piety, study and action. We enable the working of the Holy Spirit and believe that our efforts will bear fruit because the Holy Spirit is always successful, even if we know nothing about it.

Most importantly, the whole weekend resembles, as much as possible what occurs in real life. Nothing is contrived or manipulated. It is real and natural. Nothing is secret, nothing is hidden, and nothing is out of the ordinary – because ordinary Christian work and worship *is* super-natural simply because it is focused on Christ and the Holy Spirit. Nothing more is needed.

My experience with Cursillo weekends over 25 years has seen remarkable changes. It started with a movement that was very active and held two men's and two women's weekends every year. Each weekend had approximately 25 - 30 candidates. The weekends were packed with all kinds of extraordinary events that were not to be mentioned outside a weekend and then only in whispers. We had an agape evening, palanca notes (which we would stay up most of the night writing), skits with lots of dress-ups, lots of singing, special

meals planned by the kitchen, and a final mass with the entire Cursillo community and a special cross given to each candidate. All of these things had been added to the original weekend schedule of rollos, daily mass, morning and evening prayer, and chapel meditations. All were good, but unnecessary and, often, a distraction from the true purpose: showing people Jesus through friendship.

By the third day, after a lot of listening, all the special events, late nights and early mornings, most of the candidates and team were exhausted and a bit dazed from sleep deprivation. Team burnout happened frequently and, though most people loved the weekends, it took a lot of time and energy to put one on.

What was often missing was the friendship part – the very essence of Cursillo. As team, we often had little time to develop friendships with the candidates. I must have worked 30 plus weekends and I can only remember a handful of candidates and not many more team unless we worked consistently the same weekends. There just wasn't time to develop the friendships. It was all about the spiritual highs on the weekend. It had all become about something else.

The last weekends in which I was involved were organized around the new three-day Step-by-Step Rector's Guide. The

weekend experience has been pared down. It resembles more closely what a real life of prayer looks like: morning prayer, mass and scripture meditations, a rollo, discussion with friends about what was heard in the rollo, time for quiet prayer, time for developing friendships at meals and in the corridor time when people just talk about what they are experiencing. There is more time for sleep. There is reconciliation, time in the chapel and evening prayer. There is a fiesta on Saturday night – more flexibility and spontaneity. Everything is quieter and more prayerful. And we ended the weekend with energy having been fed physically and spiritually. Candidates left the weekend on fire for the Lord, enthusiastic for the Cursillo, and anxious to get into reunion groups, if they weren't already in one. Most formed reunion groups on the last day. All were looking forward to the next Ultreya.

We had time to show the candidates the face of Jesus. The three encounters could happen and develop. I was a very fruitful time together. What a difference; it was a different experience, but the same love of God and others.

We had a small team of ten men and eight candidates. There were three team in the kitchen and community members came in to help for meals. We had a female Kitchen Head (imagine that on a

Men's weekend) and the teach wasn't hidden. It worked very well and was much easier to manage.

Not everyone in our movement in Grouard-McLennan has been happy with the changes. Some have left the movement in sadness or anger. However, those who have stayed and worked as team on a weekend, or on the Secretariat, or have experienced the School of Leaders are more fervent, committed and dedicated than ever. Those who participated in the last men's weekends have seen the benefits, and have been blessed.

What does showing people Jesus look like in the post-Cursillo weekend? Well, most profoundly, there is a new understanding that the work begun on the weekend does not end when it is over. Showing people Jesus in the post-Cursillo means showing up! **Period!** We don't abandon candidates; we continue to walk with them. We make sure they get into a reunion group, even forming a new group if necessary. We go with them to Ultreya and help them make it a habitual way of living. We encourage them to attend mass, develop a prayer life, and live the new reality to which they have been introduced.

All the while we study our environments and with our new friends continue to bring the gospel message to all we meet. We look

for opportunities to reach out to the far away ones and find ways to bring Jesus into the conversation and the places we visit. We open the doors of the churches in which we worship and take the full meaning of Jesus and his gospel out into the streets where we live. New candidates will emerge and, when the time is right, we hold another weekend. In this way, one person's post-Cursillo has become another's pre-Cursillo experience. And the Cursillo goes on and on.

So, what is our task in the days and weeks ahead? Where do we go from here? Well, today and this mini-conference is a beginning. Let those of us who are here, from wherever you have come, think of ways we can reach out to the Cursillistas we know and begin the conversation we are having here. If our Group Reunion has stopped meeting, we start them up again. We call people and invite them personally back into our group.

We encourage movements to begin in-person Ultreyas again and advertise that they are happening so people can attend. We use the phones, social media and emails to invite people personally. We spread the word that Cursillo is alive and well and still in the process of evangelizing environments.

We encourage Cursillistas, active and inactive, to attend the three days as an auxiliary team member. We talk to Secretariats in our dioceses and parishes and encourage them to hold three days for Cursillistas and new candidates so that the fire can be lit anew. We form teams to hold the weekend and encourage and evangelize each other. If there are only six candidates we do it for the six. Jesus would leave the 99 and go after the one; we don't leave the six behind because they are not enough. We start small and build from there!

We organize and hold Grand Ultreyas, though I have never attended one, and don't really know what happens there, but there are many people who do know what they are all about. We ask advice from those who know.

In short, we remember that we are all Christian evangelists with a responsibility and a desire to spread the gospel. We use every means at our disposal to spread the good news of God's love to everyone we know, and, in the words of St. Francis, *"we use words, if necessary"*.

Mostly, we remember the prophet Isaiah saying: "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the poor" (Is 61:1). We were each

anointed at our Confirmation. As priest, prophet and king we are called to preach this good news. And it is joyful work – not always easy – but joyful. Let us each renew our commitment to “show people Jesus” Cursillo gives us the means to live out our Christian commitment in a joyful and loving way. We have all experienced it. Let us give others that opportunity, as well.

De Coloras!

Sources:

Archbishop Rino Fisichella first president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. An article reproduced with permission from *The New Evangelization* (Gracewing Publishing), in America Magazine, October 15, 2012.

The Very Reverend Robert Willis, Dean of Canterbury Cathedral, on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/2b6AfmwwLOM>.

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