

CHRIST IS COUNTING ON YOU

The Cursillo movement Bringing the Gospel to a changing world

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Cursillo weekend and believed his or her protégé had the makings of a potential Gospel advocate.

After his first Cursillo, Rocchi found he had lost all interest, however casual, in looking at pornography.

Then he went one step farther by telling his co-workers how he felt.

"Most of them would just look at me," Rocchi said, recalling the way his co-workers reacted when he asked whether they would read such magazines at home in front of their wives and daughters.

Although few of his co-workers openly supported his disdain for porn, Rocchi did notice a change.

"I just noticed that the stuff wasn't around anymore," commented Rocchi, who currently serves as the Diocese of Rochester's lay director of the Cursillo movement. The movement will mark its 25th anniversary in the diocese on Saturday, Oct. 17, during a celebration at Brighton's Our Lady of Mercy High School.

Rocchi's effort to bring Christian values into his workplace embodies the Cursillo movement's ultimate goal — bringing the Gospel to a world that seems to have lost much of its soul.

As explained by a Cursillo manual published by the Dallas-based National Cursillo Center: "the talks should inspire the making of a full choice. The spirit of the Gospel should pervade all dimensions of one's life."

The first evening of a Cursillo weekend sets the tone for this Gospel focus. According to the agenda outlined in *The Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement*, participants hear an opening talk and then meditate on the merciful aspects of God's love as depicted in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.

The first full day consists of "a basic proclamation of the Christian faith," as put forth in several talks and discussions. The role of lay people in the church forms part of the day's focus.

Day two examines how a Catholic may form a Christian life, particularly through the sacraments and evangelizing. The day's activities also considers the obstacles that a person may encounter on his or her spiritual journey.

On the final day of the Cursillo, participants learn how to translate their beliefs into action, by transforming their everyday environment into one befitting the Gospel.

All sessions are conducted by a team of clergy, religious and lay people, and the Eucharist highlights each day. Generally, about 20-22 team members work with about 40 participants, Rocchi said, noting that men and women conduct their Cursillo weekends on separate weekends.

The weekends seem invariably to change the lives of those who participate. Just ask Warren and Marion Ru-

tan of Newark Valley, who have both served as Cursillo "rectors," or team leaders.

"It answered a whole bunch of questions I had been unable to answer," Warren Rutan said of his first Cursillo in May, 1975.

A convert to Catholicism from the Congregational Church, Rutan noted that the Cursillo taught him a great deal about enriching his Christian faith through Scripture reading and such daily prayers as the rosary. By adopting such practices, Rutan asserted, he became a much better Christian than he was before he made his first Cursillo.

"I had something of a temper problem and it helped me curb that," he said. "It gave me more tolerance toward my co-workers, and I became a lot more tolerant toward my family."

His wife, Marion, likewise observed that without Cursillo, "I don't think Warren would be doing what he is doing now" — studying for the diaconate.

Like her husband, Marion Rutan said the Cursillo movement helped her to appreciate reading Scripture daily — something she did not do as a "cradle Catholic." The Bible's view of Jesus warms her heart much more so than did the images she grew up with before making her Cursillo, she added.

"It's much easier to view Christ as a human being who walked the face of the earth and had problems as we do," she said.

Her own model of lay spiritual life was changed dramatically by her Cursillo experience, Marion continued. The weekend helped her accept the fact that Vatican II called for lay Catholics to take responsibility for their own spiritual development. And such development has also led her and her husband to feel at ease sharing their Christian faith with their friends and neighbors, she said.

"I was afraid to mention that I was a Catholic," she acknowledged. "I was afraid to utter the word because someone might look at me askance."

Echoing the experience of the Rutans is Dr. Larry Monaco, a Rochester-area physician. Monaco and his wife, Sharon, serve as co-directors for the School of Leaders in the diocesan Cursillo movement. The School of Leaders consists of 21 *cursillistas* who have dedicated themselves to serving the movement by weekly study of its ideals and those of the church as embodied in its documents.

As a physician working at Rochester General Hospital, Monaco said he is unafraid of letting people know where he stands as a Christian on controversial issues. When the hospital recently started offering abortions, for example, he let his colleagues know that he was opposed to the practice.

His publicly professed faith does not mean just taking stands on social is-

sues, Monaco emphasized. That faith also encompasses the day-to-day encounters with patients.

"I'm constantly aware of having to reflect Christian values when it comes to taking care of people," he said, adding, "People say, 'If there's any question about God, go ask Larry.'"

There's no question that the Monacos want to raise their four sons, ages 15-22, in a Christian home, Sharon Monaco said, noting, for example, that she doesn't allow R-rated films to be watched in her residence.

"I think it's just trying to be an example of Christianity to them," she said of the rules she sets for her sons.

Maintaining such a strong adherence to the faith can be difficult, which is why *cursillistas* are asked to join a local "friendship group." These groups, often made up of a few neighboring Catholic men or women who have also participated in the weekends, meet once a week. In turn, these neighborhood groups gather monthly for regional meetings known as *Ultreya*s — Spanish for "Onward."

The regular meetings buttress the participants' faith through Christian fellowship, noted Father Dave Bonin, the pastor of St. Mary's of the Lake in Watkins Glen. Along with Sister Dolores Ann Stein, Father Bonin serves as spiritual co-director of the diocesan Cursillo movement.

The men he meets with encourage him to carry on his ministry despite such obstacles as the apathy of irregular church-goers, Father Bonin said.

"Priesthood is not always easy," he said. "These men listen to my story."

Young "fallen away" Catholic men were the target of the original *cursillistas* — young Spaniards of the 1940s who, with the help of interested clergy, developed the *cursillo de cristianidad*: "little course in Christian living."

After taking root in Spain, the Cursillo movement spread among Spanish-speaking Catholic men and women in the southwestern United States, and its methods were translated into English by 1961. Currently, 144 English Cursillo movements exist in U.S. dioceses, along with 87 Spanish Cursillos.

Cursillo arrived in the diocese by way of members of the Hispanic community who had participated in them in other dioceses, according to Cheryl E. Ramsey of Irondequoit, assistant lay director of the diocese's movement and official historian for the 25th anniversary celebration. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen welcomed the first Cursillo, which took place in November, 1967, at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

EDITORS' NOTE: To learn about the Cursillo movement, call Tony Rocchi at 607/535-2786; Cheryl Ramsey at 716/266-6193; or Marilyn Castiglione at 315/253-2382.

De Colores: a greeting *cursillistas* use among themselves that embodies their desire to bring a vibrant, colorful sense of Christian joy to a world with many different people.

Christ Is Counting On You: a phrase inscribed on the cross every *cursillo* participant receives after a retreat weekend's conclusion.