

NLS Leadership Training Course 101

A Manual for the Training of Leaders
in the Via de Cristo Method of Renewal



A Publication of
The National Lutheran Secretariat
for
Via de Cristo

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**The Next Step: Understanding Your Weekend
NLS LEADERSHIP COURSE 101**

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INTRODUCTION

In July of 1998, at the National Lutheran Secretariat (NLS) Meeting held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a committee was formed for the purpose of developing leadership training materials in order to encourage and strengthen the following among cursillistas:

- 1) an attitude of servanthood and accountability;
- 2) understanding of the Via de Cristo method;
- 3) insights into one's own weekend experience;
- 4) the role of the team;
- 5) one's life in the Fourth Day.

It was further decided that the materials should be organized into two instructional courses. The first course is designed to be covered in approximately four hours; the other, a more extensive one, is designed to last about eight hours.

The material contained herein is for the four hour course. We have identified it as, "*The Next Step: Understanding Your Weekend*." It is also identified as NLS Leadership Training Course 101. Please note that this course is based on the following helpful materials available from the National Lutheran Secretariat, either from their Distribution Center or their website (viadecristo.org).

- Ed Kutay's 1999 NLS forum on "Dynamics of the Weekend" - available in video or in text form
- The Dan Bobst/Pat Dever/Fred Schneider 1996 NLS forum on "Sponsoring"
- The Jack and Bette Packer 1996 NLS forum on "Group Reunion"
- The "Ultreya" handbook distributed at the 2000 NLS meeting.
- "The Essentials of the Via de Cristo" Manual.
- "Dynamics of the Via de Cristo Weekend" by Luther Piel
- "The Essentials of Via de Cristo", NLS 1997

Within the time constraints, it will be impossible to cover all the topics in detail. Decisions regarding who the presenters for each section might be are left to the discretion of the workshop leader, although recommendations have been provided for Sections V and VI. The leader may decide to use other resource persons or to do the entire workshop without outside help. Style of presentation should be as experiential as possible. The presenter should use this material as background in order to avoid reading from the text.

A Question and Answer period might be held informally after the conclusion of the workshop. The leader will need to adjust time and schedule according to local needs and preferences.

PLANNING FOR A LEADERSHIP TRAINING WORKSHOP

The local Secretariat should sponsor a Leadership Training at least twice each year in order to provide an opportunity for cursillistas to learn more about Via de Cristo and to understand more fully both the dynamics of weekend and the VdC movement in general. Ideally, these schools would be scheduled far enough in advance of the weekends so that new cursillistas can be advised of the time and location before their weekend is over. It would be advisable to develop a brochure promoting the school and providing scheduling details that could be included in the palanca bags during the weekend. All should be encouraged to attend in order to maximize fuller understanding and enjoyment of the Fourth Day. It is recommended that all those who wish to work on teams be required, as a minimum, to attend the four hour course.

In addition to securing a place and setting the time, a registration form will be needed in order to ascertain how many persons are expected. A nominal fee may be required to cover the cost of materials. Plans should be made to furnish light refreshments, coffee, tea, soft drinks, ice, cups, etc. If the session will run over into lunch time, it is suggested that each person bring a bag lunch; this will help keep things simple. Thought should be given to the table arrangements if any small group discussions are to take place. Paper, pencils, notebooks, name tags, etc. may also be needed for each person attending.

Someone should be appointed to be in charge of registration. Each Secretariat needs to maintain a roster of persons who have completed the course. The longer course (201) should probably be **required** for persons who are candidates for positions such as rector/rectora, members of the Secretariat, heads of team groups, etc.

A sample registration form appears on the next page.

VIA DE CRISTO

LEADERSHIP TRAINING REGISTRATION FORM

Twice each year the _____ Secretariat conducts Leadership Training classes. The purpose of Leadership Training is to provide an opportunity to learn more about Via de Cristo, and to promote a greater understanding of both the weekend and the movement in general. Topics covered will include progression and dynamics of the weekend, true palanca, group reunions and ultreyas, selection of and sponsorship of a candidate (pilgrim), history of Cursillo® and Via de Cristo, and the role of the Secretariat.

The next Leadership Training class will be held on _____

At _____ Cost is \$_____ per person.

Come to our Leadership Training if you want to gain a fuller understanding of Via de Cristo and your own weekend, wish to serve on a team, or merely want to gain a fuller understanding of what it means to live in the 4th Day.

To register, complete and mail the Registration Form to:

(Insert Your Movement's Information Here)

Please enclose a check in the amount of _____ payable to: _____

_____. Early Registration will be appreciated.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING REGISTRATION

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone () _____ Church _____

Weekend Attended _____ Via de Cristo _____

Other Movement (Name) _____

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

9:00- 9:15		Registration
9:15- 9:45	I.	Opening Prayer and Introductions; Attitude of Servanthood
9:45-10:30	II.	Progression and Dynamics of the Weekend A. Essentials B. Themes for Each Day
10:30-10:45	III.	Prayer and Sacrifice A. True Definition of Palanca B. Letter Palanca C. Optional Expressions of Love and Support
11:45-11:00	IV.	Break
11:00-11:45	V.	Group Reunion A. Definition and Importance B. Purpose: Accountability and Commitment C. Demonstration and Role Play
11:45-12:10	VI.	Other Fourth Day Reinforcements A. Ultreya 1) Definition and Importance 2) Purpose: Community Support and Renewal B. Servant Opportunities 1) Environment 2) Community 3) Weekend Team 4) Secretariat
12:10-12:30	VII.	Preparation and Sponsorship of Pilgrims/Candidates A. Who Should or Should Not Attend B. Responsibilities of Sponsors (before, during and after weekend)
12:30-12:45	VIII.	History of Cursillo A. Origin of Cursillo B. Origin of Via de Cristo C. Local Origin and Structure of Secretariat
12:45-1:00		Question and Answer Period

Closing Prayer

Section and Title: I. WELCOME, OPENING, SERVANTHOOD

Length: 30 Minutes

WELCOME, OPENING PRAYER, INTRODUCTIONS

It is suggested that, after welcoming everyone, the workshop be opened with prayer. This might be the prayer to the Holy Spirit found on page ___ of *The Pilgrim's Guide* or one of your own, thanking God for safe arrival, the past weekend, and asking His blessings upon the workshop.

If this is a small group, the introductions could be handled by asking each person to stand, give the usual information (name, church, weekend, table) and then state how things have changed since their weekend. Time constraints would prohibit doing it this way with a large group.

ATTITUDE OF SERVANTHOOD

Via de Cristo's purpose and focus remains the same as that of the Cursillos of the 1940s in Spain: To bring every pilgrim/candidate into a closer, more meaningful, personal relationship with our brother Jesus Christ and to train lay people to bear witness to Christ in their daily environments.

Serving as a [Cha-Cha (substitute your Secretariat's terminology)] provides unique and rewarding opportunities to serve our Lord and is, perhaps, the most unselfish giving involved in making a Via de Cristo weekend a success. We serve on the weekend to display Christian discipleship, love, and acceptance of others as individuals. We submit our hearts and souls to God's will so that our love will bloom and grow. We serve as examples so that, when the weekend is over, the pilgrims/candidates will be able to say, "I came looking for Christ, and I found Him here."

Servanthood is the mark of a leader. Jesus, "though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a *servant*." (Philippians 2:6-7). We can express that Jesus is Lord of our lives by the way in which we serve others. We can demonstrate our love for God by serving our brothers and sisters with love.

Servanthood is an attitude. Paul set the example of being a "slave to all" so that he might win more to Christ (I Corinthians 9:19). When Paul, under arrest and traveling under Roman guard, was shipwrecked on an island on a very cold day, he went out and gathered firewood. He did his part. He did not wait for others to do it. (Read Acts 27:14-28:10).

When we have an attitude of servanthood, we display leadership and loving concern - not dominion or glory-seeking. On a Via de Cristo team, no one position is more important than another. Some positions are more visible, but are not more important. All positions work to the glory of God.

Why do we serve? For Jesus' sake! Pick up a bundle of sticks, a plate, or someone's spirit...for Jesus' sake. It means being liberal with your time, energy, and ideas...for Jesus' sake. We serve one another...for Jesus' sake.

Section and Title: II. PROGRESSION AND DYNAMICS

A. Essentials

B. Themes for Each Day

Length: 45 Minutes

ESSENTIALS

Webster's New World Dictionary defines essential as 1) of, or constituting the intrinsic fundamental nature of something: basic, inherent...2) necessary to make a thing what it is; indispensable, requisite. "*The Essentials of Via de Cristo*" published by the National Lutheran Secretariat states that the following items are essential for an authentic three Day Weekend: palanca, silent retreat, 72 hours, 14/15 talks, note taking, discussions, posters, decuria sharing, 5 meditations, Celebration of Repentance, Holy Communion daily, closing and crosses. As a rule, each and all of these are present during an authentic weekend.

Throughout the years many other activities have been used on the weekends. To name just a few, we have skits, send-off, foot washing, singing for meals, trinkets, and serenades. These optional activities are neither wrong nor right, but they are not considered essential to the purpose of the weekend. When we crowd too much else into the weekend, it crowds out important time for reflection and community building.

Essentials with Definitions:

Palanca – Deep, intentional, selfless, sacrificial **prayer**.

Seventy-two Hours – Three full days of Christian Community away from *all* distractions of daily life.

Holy Communion Daily – Jesus is truly present in word and sacrament; both are made available to participants.

Five Meditations – Five guided image meditations that are offered to assist the participants in examining their relationship with Christ.

14/15 Talks – Actually separated parts of **one** talk necessary to cover the basics of the Via de Cristo Method.

Note Taking or Write-Downs – Specific ideas and power phrases that capture the essential points of each talk.

Discussions – Small group encounters where Christ can come alive in the community and the fundamentals of Christianity can be reviewed.

Posters – Hand drawn expressions of the essential meaning of each talk.

Decuria Sharing – A summarizing of the day's talks; a wonderful opportunity for participants to talk before a large group.

Silent Retreat – A period without talking; offered the first night to prick the consciences of the participants.

Celebration of Repentance – An examination of our life in light of the gospel; offered the first night to stimulate serious self-reflection.

Crosses – A cross, common to the Cursillo® movement, with a telling inscription, “Christ is counting on you!”

Closing or Clausura – The welcome of new participants into the community as a whole; designed to assure them that there are many brothers and sisters who understand.

ADIAPHOROUS OR NON-ESSENTIALS

We make a clear distinction between those things essential to the weekend and those things that are not essential to the purpose of the weekend. Non-essentials would include the following:

Agape Meal or Special Banquet	Sunday wake-up serenade
Saturday Night Serenade	Sunday afternoon serenade
Bible enthronement	Bible recessional
Flower for each rollista (Women)	Theme for the weekend
Skits	De Colores “productions”
Singing for Meals	Singing sessions in the evenings
Popcorn Fellowship	Aisle of lights
Send-off	Personal palanca letters
Table palanca, trinkets, etc.	The big chicken or rooster
Stations of the cross	Baptism/communion films in rollo

Any other activity not listed as essential

It remains the responsibility of the local Secretariat to define which, if any, non-essentials are included in its weekends. Because non-essentials can take up time required for essentials, it is recommended that the list of approved non-essentials be kept to a minimum. A rector should not vary from the approved list without the Secretariat’s pre-approval.

PROGRESSION AND DYNAMICS OF THE WEEKEND

There is a saying that the less one knows about the weekend, the more one wants to change it; the more one knows about the weekend, the less one wants to change it. As we begin to understand both the dynamics and progression of the weekend, we will attest to the truth of this statement. (NOTE to the PRESENTER: pages 12-14 can be used as either handouts or overhead transparencies to help explain “dynamics”.)

DYNAMICS

What do we mean by “dynamics?” By dynamics we are referring to those particular things, words, or events that have a significant influence on, or motivate participants. To quote Luther Piel, “DYNAMICS is defined as a force that produces motion, a force that moves something. The key word is MOVES. Now on a weekend, everything we do on a Via de Cristo weekend is to ‘move’ the candidates, not physically and not emotionally, but spiritually. We want the candidates to move to a higher spiritual ‘level,’ or a higher spiritual plain.”¹ We want these things to be a positive influence—things that motivate the pilgrims/candidates to participate, to open themselves up, to break down walls, to accept God’s love in their lives and then to want to share God’s love and grace with others. The progression of the weekend allows all parts of the weekend to fit together into a progression: the talks, worship, music, palanca notes, food, and visibility of the support teams. The weekend is allowed to move at its own progression from handshakes to hugs, conversation to prayers. It begins on a subdued, non-threatening note and builds gradually, thus allowing the Holy Spirit to work as He will within the hearts of the participants.

Positive dynamics move the participants to participate, to open up, to tear down walls, to accept God’s love and grace in their lives. In order for this to happen, team members will really share with the participants. They will, by word and example, share their own personal hope, their love of Jesus, and their joy and willingness to live a spiritual discipline.

The team members will slowly provide **living examples** of the Christian life in the three areas of *Piety, Study, and Action*. As team members allow the participants to truly know them, they will speak of their own doubts, fear, **and** faith. Seeing and sharing with real people will encourage participants to do the same. The team should make every effort to truly know the participants by using their names (correctly), asking about their homes, work, personal feelings, thoughts and dreams.

Music, used correctly, can and should be a positive dynamic. Singing has to start in a very “low-key” manner. Music should match the rest of the dynamics of the weekend. It’s not just thrown in “because someone wants it for his/her rollo.” We should take care that we don’t use too many new songs on the weekend—probably a total of 8 to 10 songs are enough for the weekend. These are the songs that should be used at the serenade. Music used as it is intended can be a very powerful and positive dynamic.

The Worship and Communion services are also a powerful dynamic. Special thought and preparation should be given to these services. Many Secretariats use interactive “sermons” during worship that may be a new experience for some of the pilgrims/candidates. It is not unusual for participants to express their feelings of finding worship on the weekend more meaningful than “at home” in their churches.

¹ *Dynamics of the Via de Cristo Weekend*, Luther Piel

Negative Dynamics do just the opposite of positive ones. Some of the things that can push a participant into a shell and defeat the objectives of the weekend include:

Intimidation: Anything that puts people on the defensive;

Confusion: Disorganization, wasting time, arguments;

Secrecy: Whispering, evasive answers, **not being honest**;

Bragging: In talks, conversations, or discussions;

Irritations: childish actions, physical discomfort, and lewd behavior—even in jest. (If you have **any** doubts about whether or not a joke is appropriate, **don't use it!**);

Charismatics: Speaking in tongues.

Fatigue: Lack of sleep or rest time.

Theological Error: Misquoting the Bible, misinterpreting the role of VdC within the church, *e.g.*, “I was baptized as a baby, but I finally became a Christian on my Via de Cristo Weekend.”

Uninteresting Talks: long lectures, sermons, off the subject, being too clever, too complicated;

Overly regimented: “brain washing,” lack of free thought, feeling manipulated, “boot camp;”

Fear of change: the three most used words in the Lutheran language.

Fear of being “Put Down”: Worrying about saying something dumb.

PROGRESSION OF THE WEEKEND AND THEMES

(Note to the presenter: page 15 can be used as a handout or overhead transparency to help explain progressions.) Before the team comes to the weekend, it should already be a Christian community. By Thursday night, a formed community should be awaiting the arrival of the participants. How does the team achieve this unity? Through a series of team meetings held prior to the weekend. It is, therefore, vital that the team members be committed to attending and fully participating in the team meetings during which there will have been sharing, understanding, sharing in liturgy, song, and worship. If a team member cannot, or is unwilling, to commit to team meeting attendance, then perhaps this is not the weekend that (s)he is being called to serve. This is also true of commitment to be in attendance for the **entire** weekend. By no means should a professor **ever** leave the weekend except in the case of a dire emergency.

All this is done so that, beginning on Thursday night, the team members are ready to spread out and incorporate the participants into their community—thus forming a larger community. The first job of a team member is to welcome the participants and draw them into the caring environment.

THURSDAY EVENING

Thursday begins the preparation process for the weekend. The question presented through the 1st Meditation (Know Yourself) and the 2nd Meditation (Prodigal Son) is **Who Am I?** *The Way of the Cross* may or may not be presented this evening. (Many movements have moved this to Friday evening.) **Emotions** are apprehensive and introspective. Silence is introduced here. It can be a very effective dynamic on the weekend. Many scripture passages affirm silence. It can be useful before and during chapel, around the altar, and before discussions in the rollo room. On Thursday evening we use it to encourage the individuals to seriously explore their own lives.

FRIDAY

(Focus: A call, a beautiful calling)

On Friday, **the first day**, the intent is to continue bringing the participants face-to-face with themselves. The continuing question remains, **Who Am I?** Through the chapel meditation, *The Three Glances of Christ*, we hear about three people on whom Christ directed his gaze; each responded differently.

The content of the five talks (*Ideal, Grace, Laity, Grace in Action, and Piety*) on Friday present the ideal of living a life of grace. The progression is from the “non-spiritual,” philosophical *Ideal* talk to the key talk in the method of the weekend—the *Piety* talk. This talk is the first to include “personal testimony.” Normally a change in the atmosphere of the weekend will be evident after the *Piety* talk.

The **emotions** of the day will be tense, nervous, eager, from the head not the heart. The job of the table leaders will be to help form a community at the table. At first a false community will form with everyone “being nice.” Later, as table members get bold enough to express their differences, the table leader will become a positive dynamic in the process if (s)he will share honestly, listen attentively, and encourage others to do the same. As this process begins, a true table community will be formed, and the natural table leaders will begin to take over. These leaders are, and should be, the true leaders at the table.

We intentionally keep the weekend subdued on Friday until after the *Piety* talk. If we build too fast, we can lose some of the participants. Persons who are slower in reacting to the weekend may be disturbed by the emotion others are showing and may even begin to feel isolated and outside the community.

On Friday evening is the first Decuria. Now we begin to shape the whole community with all participants involved together. If there are participants who have shown an interest in counseling, they should be encouraged to seek out a spiritual director.

SATURDAY

(Focus: Individual, personal, “how to”)

On Saturday, **the second day**, the talks are geared toward answering the question of **how to personally live the life of grace**. Participants may be wondering if they can really attain the ideal of a conscious growing life in Christ. Prayer is introduced as a personal conversation with our brother Christ.

Chapel is begun with the meditation, *The Figure of Christ*. Here the emphasis is on the humanity of Christ, the Christ who is living now, and on the personality of Christ that attracts so many. Today the talks (*Study, Sacraments or Grace Filled Days, Apostolic Action, Obstacles to Grace*, and *Leaders*) move into how the participants can do it. In the *Leaders* talk, each person is inspired to recognize his/her potential to become a leader.

Each table is asked to make a chapel visit during the day. Here we encourage the dynamic of freedom—freedom to speak or to be silent.

Emotions are at a crossroads; they are mixed and emotionally drained. There is expectation and joy.

SUNDAY

(Focus: Presence in world, relations with other Christians)

On Sunday, **the third day**, our thoughts are projected out into the world. We are told **how we can bring Christ to the world in which we live**. It is a call to apostolic action. The day begins with the meditation, *Christ’s Message to the Participant*. We hear that Christ has called and chosen us.

The talks of the day (*Environment, Life in Grace, Christian Community in Action, Total Security* and *Fourth Day*) present the Via de Cristo method - how to operate a successful approach to Christian life. These instructions must be as clear as possible.

Emotions often include joy, tiredness, saturation point, concern about the 4th Day, hearts on fire, or questioning if the mountain top experience can be maintained.

The tight structure has been loosened, and the mechanics of the service sheet aren’t very exciting. Team members sometimes feel as though the whole weekend is falling apart. The energy level of the pilgrims/candidates has heightened, but the energy level of the team has dropped off. We must be accepting of those who seem not to have gotten the message. The spiritual encounter must remain between the participant and God. Beware of judging whether or not a pilgrim/candidate “got it” by how many Kleenex (s)he has used!

The team must keep taking notes, keep discussing and encouraging. They must help the pilgrims/candidates with the service sheet, suggesting a realistic commitment. *The success of the weekend is measured only by how well the participants attend group reunions after the weekend.*

At the closing, the participants discover the greater community and are encouraged by the fact that these people really care and are actively living in the Fourth Day.

Circles

The dynamics of the weekend are directed at expanding circles. On Thursday evening, the individual's circle is about 18 inches—the size of one individual. The pilgrims/candidates are often nervous and unsure of what's going to happen. We should do everything possible to respect that circle and to help the individual feel more comfortable. How many times have you heard the words, "If I had had a way to get home, I would have left Thursday night!" Silly games can be a real turnoff. There should be no hugging by the team. Everyone should be quietly casual.

On Friday, we see a circle form that's as big as the table, about eight feet. This will be particularly evident as the table begins to work on their first poster. We want that table to build as a group and to form into friendships.

By Saturday, hopefully, the circle will have become the size of the rollo room. By Sunday, we want it to be as big as the world.

Additional Information

Individual sheets depicting "Positive Dynamics", "Negative Dynamics", "Progression and Dynamics Chart" are provided at the end of this section. It is suggested that they be used as handout materials.

The first section of the "Progression and Dynamics Chart" should be read across from left to right. Note that the first talks of each day appeal to the intellect. The second talks of each day deal with living the life in grace. The third talks deal with the will to act; the fourth, obstacles to living in grace; and the last talks of each day, matters of the heart (Dedication to Christ and His work.) The second section of the chart follows the same process, reading from left to right and capsulizes how each topic is addressed each day.

Resources and suggested additional reading:

The Essentials of the Via de Cristo, NLS, 1997

Ed Kutay's "Dynamics of the Weekend", NLS, 1999

POSITIVE DYNAMICS
(Things We Grow in Spiritually)

1. Hearing our name; being part of our family, part of a church family, understanding we're part of God's family.
2. See others love us, loving ourselves, **truly** loving God, and sharing God's love with others.
3. Rote singing; relating songs to special experiences, thinking and meditating on the words, worshipping and praising God in song.
4. Reticent to talk; discussion in small groups, standing in front of a small non-threatening group, witnessing to groups and to others.
5. Hand shake, touch, enthusiastically reaching out, abbrazzo.
6. Pray privately, pray together with a group, pray by one's self in a small group...lead in prayer.
7. Attend worship service, worship attentively, participate in worship, worship in spirit and truth.
8. Burdened with sin, understand God's grace and mercy, truly desire forgiveness, completely forgiven and free.
9. Friendly, see joy in others, understand source of joy, have and share the joy of the Lord.
10. Hear about God's grace; better understand grace, desire to live in grace...**Live** in God's grace.
11. Define ideals, understand ideals, desire the best ideal, make living in God's grace the ideal of life.
12. Priorities mixed up, understand what is important, apply the great commandment, priorities in correct order.
13. Define church; understand that **we** are the church. Understand the church's mission, help the church change the world for Christ.
14. Understand piety; utilize practices of piety. Grow in relationship to God. Turn our whole life over to God.

POSITIVE DYNAMICS (Cont.)

15. Understand the need for study; learn how and what to study; **read** the Bible; develop a study program.
16. Understand need for apostolic action; learn procedures; desire to share Christ; practice apostolic action in daily life.
17. Understand Christian leadership; learn the qualities of a leader. Desire to grow as a Christian leader; develop and implement a program to **grow**.
18. Understand the Via de Cristo concept of environment. Desire to be God's person in your own environment. Learn what to do; change your environment.
19. Understand Christian community; desire to become a part. Learn what to do. Be **active** in the Christian community.
20. Persevere. Persevere! **Persevere...PERSEVERE!**

NEGATIVE DYNAMICS

Intimidation: Anything that puts people on the defensive.

Confusion: Being unorganized, wasting time, arguments.

Secrecy: Whispering, evasive answers, not being honest (lying).

Bragging: In rollos, conversations, discussions.

Irritations: Childish actions, physical discomfort.

Charismatics: Speaking in tongues

Fatigue: Lack of sleep or rest time.

Theological Error: Misquoting the Bible, *e.g.*, "When I became a Christian on my Via de Cristo weekend"

Uninteresting Rollos: Long lectures, sermons, off the subject, complicated sharing, trying to be clever.

Overly Regimented: Overly controlled, insufficient freedom, giving the impression of “brainwashing”.

Fear of Change: Three most used words in the Lutheran language

Fear of Being “Put Down”: Worrying about saying something dumb.

PROGRESSION AND DYNAMICS CHART

Theme	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Intellect	Ideal	Study	Environment
Living the Life in Grace	Grace	Grace-Filled Days	Life in Grace
The Will to Act	Laity	Action	Christian Community in Action
Overcoming Obstacles to Grace	Grace in Action	Obstacles to Grace	Total Security
Matters of the Heart	Piety	Leaders	Fourth Day

SEVERAL PROGRESSIONS OCCUR OVER THE COURSE OF THE WEEKEND

	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Family Relations	God is My Father	Jesus is My Brother	Everyone is in My Family
Our Personal Circles	Eight Feet (My Table)	The Rollo Room	The World
Growing in Grace	Hearing about Grace	Desiring to Live in Grace	Living in Grace
The Larger Community	Prays for Me	Serenades Me	Greets Me at Clausura
Getting to Know Jesus	He Calls Me	He Reveals Himself to Me	He Sends Me as His Agent

Section and Title: III. PRAYER AND SACRIFICE

A. True Definition of Palanca

B. Letter Palanca

C. Optional Expressions of Love and Support

Length: 15 Minutes

TRUE DEFINITION OF PALANCA

To begin this section of your training about Prayer and Sacrifice, we need to give the meaning of **Palanca** (pah lahn kah): “a direct word from the Spanish, meaning ‘lever.’ In the Via de Cristo, it means an outward expression of agape love through prayer and sacrifice which is offered to God in petition for grace, so that as apostles, we may accomplish more than we would be capable of otherwise.”¹ The true meaning of Palanca is “the lever that lifts.” The lever that lifts a weekend is prayer. It is the heart and life of the Via de Cristo movement and undergirds the whole weekend. It is responsible for more than we can begin to comprehend. There really is no Via de Cristo movement without prayer. It is the first and most basic step underlying all our human efforts. We know there is no substitute for prayer. Before, during, and after a Via de Cristo weekend or any undertaking of a Via de Cristo community, there is prayer. “When the pilgrims/candidates find out about the 72 hour prayer vigil, it is a powerful dynamic.”² In Matthew 7:7, as well as in many other places, Jesus tells us to pray.

At this time the leader can tell if their particular community has a prayer chain or a 24 hour prayer vigil, etc., and explain.

Prayer in its simplest form is the awareness of God. Awareness of God can be as simple as hearing from another that God listens. As was said before, prayer is the true meaning of Palanca.

Personal sacrifice goes along with prayer - hand in hand. Fasting is one example of sacrifice as is arising early or getting up in the middle of the night to pray. Another example is abstaining from a pleasurable activity for a time; each time you refrain from the activity, you’re reminded to pray. Keeping a stone in your shoe during the duration of the weekend provides a similar reminder.

LETTER PALANCA

Another form of palanca is letter palanca. This is a personal contact of community, family, friends and team members to the pilgrim/candidate **based in prayer and sacrifice**. (Without prayer, the letters are simply mementos). These letters are sent to the pilgrims/candidates to show the pilgrims/candidates they are loved and being thought of. It is vital that each and every pilgrim/candidate receive at least one letter from a close family member or very close friend. The sponsor is usually in charge of procuring the letters from the family and friends of the pilgrim/candidate they sponsored. The content of the letters is only to be a show of the love and support one has for the pilgrim/candidate. In addition, all team members should sacrifice their time and energy to write each and every pilgrim/candidate a short note of love and encouragement.

OPTIONAL EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE AND SUPPORT

Other optional expressions of love and support are as follows: the making of banners (to be used on weekends), small handmade gifts for all the pilgrims/candidates, baked goods, cooking meals, helping out in whatever way you are needed, and, money. The list can go on and on. It is important to understand that sometimes these expressions of love can be mishandled. “Palanca” can be misapplied when the team spends an inordinate amount of time before and during the weekend doing “cutesy” nametags, bookmarks, book covers, envelopes, etc. It is especially sad when someone spends \$10 at a bookstore and calls it palanca. Gifts are nice and can be a meaningful addition, but they become palanca **only** when serious prayer and sacrifice have been devoted to them.

Each Via de Cristo community has its own way of handling “Palanca”. It is important to remember, however, that gifts and tokens become palanca by adding prayer and sacrifice. This point cannot be overstated.

(Leader: Interject your own ways of handling palanca and add as required, within time constraints.)

¹ *The Essentials of Via de Cristo*, National Lutheran Secretariat, 1997

² *Dynamics of the Via de Cristo Weekend*, Luther Piel

Section and Title: IV: GROUP REUNION

A. Definition and Importance

B. Purpose: Accountability and commitment

C. Demonstration and Role Play

Length: 45 Minutes

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Day implies evangelization to us, and we encourage three activities to make living in the Fourth Day powerful. First is the use of small groups, called group reunion or reunion group. Second is the encouragement from larger gatherings we call Ultreyas. The third we refer to as spiritual direction. Group reunions and Ultreyas, which are ongoing processes of community building, will be covered in these training materials – Spiritual Direction will not.

GROUP REUNION

Group reunion simply means group meeting. Its primary discipline consists of weekly group meetings at a mutually convenient location; its primary commitment is for its members. The members use the Group Reunion Card or Service Card, often filled out on their weekend, tell how they are planning apostolic action, share how their piety and study are going, hold one another accountable, and lift each other up in prayer.

Reunion groups are very important in helping us follow Jesus. They are a place where we are held accountable for what we do, receive encouragement and support, give encouragement and support to others in the group, and are encouraged to share Christ with others.

The reunion group should have about 3-5 members in order to allow people time to share, yet keep the time short enough so everyone can make the commitment. You need to form real friendships. Be honest and open about your life in Christ. Each member needs to take the risk of being honest and open. Honesty requires us to share both the good and the bad. Help the group be a loving, caring, sharing community. Go to give of yourself and to get encouragement from the other members. The group is to be a place to receive support, so be sure you get support as well as give support to the other members. Be sure that prayer is an important part of the group.

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF REUNION GROUPS

- (1) **Natural Friendships:** Friends tend to confide and be honest with each other. Friends make long term commitments, not just short term ones.
- (2) **Membership:** Ideally there should be three to five members. When there are only two members and one can't make it, there is no meeting. And if there are more than five, it can take too long for everyone to share their piety, study, and action. Usually, when a group gets over five members, it's best to break into smaller groups, even though it is hard to leave special friends.

- (3) **Regularity and Promptness:** The meetings should be scheduled for the same time each week so that, if a member should miss a meeting, he or she doesn't have to wonder when or where it will be. Promptness is important since it allows the members to make other commitments based on the meetings being on time. That means the meeting should start and finish on time. And promptness indicates that the members care about each other's busy lives. Don't regard the group reunion as just another meeting for it might become a burden. Rather, choose to let it be a high priority in your life. Wherever you decide to meet, make sure you have privacy and can pray comfortably.
- (4) **Seriousness:** This does not mean lacking in humor. Group reunions, however, are not a time for games and a lot of socializing, but rather a time of accountability and helping the members grow in Christ. They provide a time for helping your friends through sorrows, for sharing in their joys, for helping them with major decisions, and for helping them with their piety, study, and action.
- (5) **Discretion and Confidentiality:** The information shared in the group reunions should not be shared with anyone other than the members. If things are shared randomly, the members might lose the trust of each other and may drop out of the group. Worse yet, they may never trust anyone again.
- (6) **Sincerity:** The group reunion is not a place to brag about your accomplishments; rather, its purpose is to convert the world to Christ. Christ has given us a great commandment, and we need to take it seriously. Surrounding ourselves with small groups will enable us to share our Christ-centered-ness with others. We need to be sincere, honest and loving in our sharing.
- (7) **Prayer:** Last, but not least. Prayer is the nucleus of the Via de Cristo movement. You should start your group reunion with the prayer to the Holy Spirit which is found on the appropriate page in your movement's booklet, and always end the meeting with individual prayers and possibly the Lord's Prayer as well.

The immediate objective of the leaders on the post-Cursillo® is to motivate and help new Pilgrims/candidates find a group of friends to whom they can commit themselves and with whom they can form a Christian community.

PURPOSE: ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPORTANCE

The purpose of the post Via De Cristo is to help pilgrims/candidates to be the church and to live in, and as, the church within the structures of the world. Reunion groups are one of the methods used to accomplish this goal. Eduardo Bonnín, founder of Cursillo® said, "We don't have reunion groups in order to get people to make a weekend. Rather, we hold weekends to get people into reunion groups." ¹

Basically, the aim or objective of the reunion group is to realize the vision that is presented during the three days. Hopefully, it will open up to each person the possibility of continuing this encounter with self, with Christ, and with his or her Christian brothers and sisters.

It is in the group reunion that we build one another up. We challenge one another to learn each day to act as our brother Jesus would.

The goal of the group reunion is growth in the following four areas: growth in friendship and fellowship, growth in study of the Bible, growth in apostolic action and growth in commitment.

The weekend experience is designed to make the pilgrims/candidates want to be witnesses for Christ and to live a life of evangelism. We cannot discover our gifts or minister to others in a vacuum. Reunion groups are very important in helping us follow Jesus. The reunion group is supposed to be a place where we are held accountable for what we do, a place where we receive encouragement and support, and a place where we encourage and support the other members of the group. We review our piety, study, and action on a regular basis. Reunion groups are small, grace-filled communities, and we need to feel this grace regularly in order to spread that grace through the way we live our own lives. The group reunion is a tool used by the Holy Spirit to help us live a life of grace in our environments.

Within this Christian friendship/accountability group, we nurture faith by talking about our behavior in our other environments and by encouraging Christian action. The most direct natural source of vitality in any group is to have a purpose and have its members committed to that purpose. Proclaiming a clear mission is one of the most effective ways of articulating a purpose, forming a community environment, and maintaining its growth.

The Group Reunion provides a means toward a goal. It is meant to encourage and increase both idealism and a spirit of charity in each of its members, and to help assure each person's perseverance therein.

The group reunion is a means for accomplishing Via de Cristo's goal of perseverance that is achieved by ensuring the fruit of the weekend and by nurturing and maintaining the Christian love and support we all need. When group reunion is lived, it becomes a Christian community affecting the world. What should distinguish Christians from others is our love of Christ and the joy and optimism that comes from knowing Him.

One of the goals of the reunion group is to build a real and close friendship among its members. There can be no closer friendship than one based on the common faith in Our Lord. Christ tells us that where two or three are gathered together in His name He will be there with us. So Christ does come to us in, and through, these group reunions. The reunions are something we do for His sake – something we should do prayerfully with dedication to Him, because He is present there with us.

Within group reunion we are really sharing our Christian life with our brothers/sisters. By this sharing, we encourage and uplift our fellow reunion mates; and they, in turn, encourage and uplift us. The sharing that takes place comes from the fact that we have the ability to share, the desire to share, and something to share. Sharing does not involve simply telling good things to each other, or sharing stories, but it is making others a part of one's life and participating in each other's lives. Basically, what we share is participation in an authentic (true) Christian community.

There should be very little that would interfere with a member's attending the group reunion. Further, anyone who is willing to use the ideas of friendship and accountability as a means to being a better witness for Christ should be welcome to join a group reunion even if they have not attended a 3-day weekend. The group reunion need not be an overwhelming time commitment. Group reunion is an essential and valuable part of the Via de Cristo method and must not be neglected. God honors the commitment by increasing faith, hope, and love. God sends us into our daily lives with renewed courage and desire to bring the world to Jesus Christ.

In reunion groups we regularly review our piety, study and action. Through the group reunion we surround ourselves with the grace found in community with other Christians. Although we function in different ways, we continue to use the order for reunion and strive to keep the fire going by maintaining both honesty and openness and by keeping prayer as an essential part. We go to both give and receive.

The world sees leadership as power. Jesus sees leadership as service. Service does not mean slavery. The servant is free in love and operates from grace and from gospel. In the group we create a safe place. In safety there is healing, support and continued growth. Whenever a person feels safe, there is freedom for healing and growth. In the group, we confess our broken-ness to one another. We receive absolution from one another. In this small group community, we are willingly vulnerable to one another. Members of the group reunion remove the expectations, the preconceptions, the prejudices, the solutions, and the need to heal, convert, fix, solve, or control.

Our society is not conditioned to Christian community. No matter how well intentioned and devoted a person might be, it will always be difficult living out the Christian faith without the help, support and contact of other Christians. The work of the Via de Cristo is to help Christians become effective apostles and grow as saints. Via de Cristo believes that small friendship/accountability groups are building blocks for vital Christian community and for perseverance in the Christian life.

A reunion group can do this. The group can decide upon a project that involves the entire group. They can then tackle something that no one individual might do on his own. Through the group, they all might learn to bloom right where they are.

If the Via de Cristo weekends produce groups which are authentic Christian communities and they persevere afterwards, then the movement will achieve its purpose to build up the church and bring Christ into the environment. Our emphasis, then, must be to offer the pilgrims/candidates a method of living in friendship that is shared in a Christian way so that, as a consequence of their being Christian together, their apostolic life overflows into their life situations.

Some things that may cause a reunion group to fail are:

- (a) lack of commitment,
- (b) lack of confidentiality,
- (c) lack of time. Someone seems to use all the time with sharing all of his or her problems.

The first item of business for the reunion group is to pray the Holy Spirit prayer, followed by going through the "Piety, Study, Action, and Your Closest Moment to Christ",

- (d) lack of the right servant attitude. We are to go to reunion groups for what we can give our brothers/sisters, not what we can get out of it,
- (e) lack of depth with the sharing. Share what struck you, what you got out of the sermon, etc. and
- (f) lack of punctuality. This is being disrespectful to your reunion group.

In closing, the reunion group is the backbone of our Via de Cristo. We all know that the weekend would become just a beautiful memory, “a mountain top experience” and would soon fade into the past if we did not continue the weekend process through group reunion, ultreyas, team and other weekend participation. The intent of the weekend is to encourage pilgrims/candidates to maintain a Christian walk on a daily basis. We hope to help them to find their niche in their own church and community. We want them to continue their encounter with Christ and to be leaders in carrying the banner of Christ. We feel the way to accomplish this is through small close-knit groups. God intended that we have fellowship; and, from the very beginning of the church, this has been an important part of Christianity. The goal of the reunion group is to encourage each other to grow in faith and to lead a life balanced in piety, study, and action. Remember, an “isolated Christian is a paralyzed Christian.”

DEMONSTRATION AND ROLE PLAY

A major function of the weekend is to teach the pilgrims/candidates the importance of Christian fellowship by being models of the strength that comes from grouping. We need to witness to them how our group reunions have helped us to grow spiritually, give us courage to be a witness for Christ, and learn to love one another.

How do you start a group reunion? Look around the room and see the natural friendships that you made during your weekend. Maybe one of them lives near you. Ask your sponsor about helping you find or start a group; it is part of his or her responsibility. You can even start a reunion group with some of your friends although they have not attended a Via de Cristo weekend since the purpose of the Via de Cristo weekend is NOT the weekend experience but rather group reunion. What better place to start a group reunion than at home among your friends at work or church? Together you can study the environments and help change the world for Christ.

We will now present a 15-minute demonstration of a group reunion.

¹ NLS Workshop on Group Reunion, 1994

Section and Title: V. **FOURTH DAY REINFORCEMENTS**
A. **ULTREYA**
1. **Definition and Importance**
2. **Community Support and Renewal**

Length: 15 minutes

Suggested Presenter: Post- weekend chairperson or ex-rector

DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE

Ultreyas, along with group reunions, serve as a way to build the Christian Community in the Fourth Day. Ultreyas are, in fact, reunion groups for reunion groups. The Fourth Day does not just happen. It happens because a pilgrim/candidate has been inspired or renewed on the weekend and then becomes a part of the wider, loving, caring, and existing community. During the Fourth Day talk (Total Security) we try to show ways that a pilgrim/candidate can participate in the Fourth Day. We talk about the importance of group reunion, the sponsor, and how the community itself can help individuals continue by getting involved in group reunions and Ultreyas. We talk about going to Leaders school so that the pilgrim/candidate can also be on a team in the future.

A quote from the Catholic Cursillo® Leader’s Manual says, “For most people, the 3-day weekend is the centerpiece of the Cursillo®. The unspoken assumption is that, if we get this part of the Cursillo® method right, the rest will fall into place. This assumption is quite wrong. The real centerpiece of the Cursillo® movement is the Fourth Day. The 3-day weekend is a catalyst to inspire and empower Christians to understand and live out their apostleship - to be witnesses for Jesus Christ in the world. A vital witness after the three days and into the Fourth Day is the aim and focus of the Cursillo® as a whole.”

This view puts a heavy emphasis on planning. The goal is literally to change the world for Christ, and to do this through Christians empowered by a vision for apostolic action. The whole movement must be continually under-girded by prayer, study, and action in order to be properly guided. Via de Cristo will help the pilgrims/candidates see that the way to become enriched is to be an enriching influence in their environments and to be apostles for Jesus Christ.

Fourth Day activities are the glue that binds the parts of the body together and helps create unity of the body.

The simplest description of the Ultreya is a meeting of Group Reunions. Here we share our witness together to the life in grace, and we challenge each other to persevere on our journey to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. While the primary Group Reunion meets weekly, Ultreyas are usually held monthly. At the Ultreya you will reaffirm friendships you made on your weekend. You will also make many new friends and receive both encouragement and support.

The Ultreya helps us to take many of the steps on the road to perseverance. For new participants, it is a place to discover what the Group Reunion is like. The Group Reunion is not learned in only one or two attempts. It requires a period of time so that its rhythm becomes a method of life. The Group Reunion is but one part of the process of community; the other part is the larger community, the Ultreya. One is not complete without the other, and growth is linked to the vitality and depth of both groups.

The purpose of Via de Cristo, as a distinct part of all Fourth Day movements, is to make it possible for us to know Christ, to share Christ, and to bring Christ into our communities, environments, and into all the world we know, linking Christians together in action. What is the role of the Ultreya in this? It provides the linkage.

Ultreya is a place where all the Group Reunions can come together for revitalization by sharing with others, a place where blessings and successes can be multiplied, and hurts and failures healed. Ultreya is a place where new pilgrims/candidates become part of the larger community. Ultreya is a place for growth in Christ. It is there that help is provided in beginning a relationship for personal spiritual guidance, in personal support through sharing of each other's experiences of living with Jesus Christ, and through inspiration from the witness talks to be courageous in transforming our environments for Christ. It is a place where the church at large meets Via de Cristo and where potential pilgrims/candidates are welcome to "look over" the movement. Ultreya is Via de Cristo's witness to the church that we are a Christ-centered movement and not a "para-church" or "super-church".

Ultreya ideally carries out the Via de Cristo spirit which is the awareness that we are saints and apostles - not only in the exciting atmosphere of the weekend, but also in the natural and normal and, sometimes, not so exciting events of our day-to-day living. We learn more deeply that we are not alone. We are linked together in the love, the fellowship, the encouragement of our brother and sister saints and apostles.

Many struggle to fit the experience of Via de Cristo into their existing lives and cultures. Ultreya gives us the tools to do the opposite—to fit our lives and cultures into the ideal and vision of Via de Cristo. Without Ultreya, the weekend soon just becomes another happy weekend, full of love and inspiration. With Ultreya, the weekend becomes a true foundation, a "kick-off" point for increased living and acting as the Body of Christ!

PURPOSE: COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RENEWAL

The immediate objective of the leaders in the post-Via de Cristo is to motivate and help new pilgrims/candidates find a group of friends to whom they can commit themselves and with whom they can form a Christian Community. The purpose of the post Via de Cristo is to help pilgrims/candidates to be the church, to live in and as the church, within the structures of the world. The Ultreya is one of our basic tools.

A quote from one Leader's Manual says, "The Ultreya will be a community to the degree that the permanent friendship groups together form a community and are willing and able to draw new members into the living community. The Ultreya should give impetus to the groups in the environments . . . The purpose of the Ultreya is ongoing formation, so that piety, study and action can be encouraged and evaluated. The purpose of Ultreya is to foster the atmosphere of unity which Christian communities must have if they are to be dynamic and radiate their fervor and zeal."

The Ultreya acts as a framework for groups to come together for mutual support. Ultreyas are a natural way for groups of reunion brothers and sisters to come together. The Ultreya is a means of unifying pilgrims/candidates into the movement.

The Ultreya's dynamic and active character should always be remembered. We come to Ultreya to unite with our brothers/sisters to share with them.

The universal elements of all Ultreyas:

Opening prayer

Music to bring the community together

Lay or witness speaker

Clergy response or reflection of the lay talk

Singing is a good way to begin the Ultreya. Songs commonly sung on Via de Cristo weekends are a good way to bring the community together.

Witness speakers at the Ultreyas give witness to their growth in living union with Christ so that others may be encouraged to do likewise. The speaker should offer concrete examples of how to live what is fundamental for being a Christian in the environment. The speaker should share something recent in his or her experience as a living example of how (s)he is living the Fourth Day as learned during his or her weekend experience. The speaker should keep it short, simple and upbeat. The person giving the lay talk should be walking the walk as an example of the talk they are talking.

Some Secretariats conduct an optional worship/communion service near the end of each Ultreya. It's important that these services are (1) scheduled near the end of the Ultreya, and (2) **optional**. This permits non-Lutheran visitors and cursillistas to leave before being "forced" to attend services which may be frowned on by denominational differences. The Ultreya may continue with Worship and Holy Communion as we honor God and His call and to give Him glory and praise. **It is important to the well-being of both the Via de Cristo Movement and the life of the congregation or congregations represented in the Ultreya that everyone understand that this worship time should never appear to be a substitute for regular church worship.** Ultreya should never be a substitute for, or a rival of, each person's deep involvement in the liturgical life of his/her own church community.

The meeting frequently begins or ends with snacks and fellowship.

The theme of each Ultreya should be transforming the world for Christ, and it is important not to be distracted from that crucial task. Each Ultreya is meant to be Christ-centered, not Via de Cristo centered. It should not concentrate on the workings of Via de Cristo, but on Jesus working within us to bring the whole world to Himself.

Any open and committed Christian should feel welcome and perfectly at home at an Ultreya regardless of church background or spiritual experience; (s)he should find strength and courage to take Jesus Christ back into events and surroundings of everyday life. It is not necessary to make a three-day weekend to participate in Fourth Day activities. In fact the entire Via de Cristo Fourth Day program is no more or less than a model for normal Christian life. The Fourth Day program combines the elements of personal piety and spiritual guidance, a small group of Christian friends (the Group Reunion), and a larger community for the support and encouragement of Christian life and witness in the world (the Ultreya). This is a major reason that Via de Cristo is not in competition with, but rather an integral part of, the institutional Church.

Ultreya is the place where the solid, continuing work of strengthening Christ's people goes on. It is where we are continually confronted with Jesus' divine commission to bring all of our environments under His Lordship and to be bearers of His good news of love and freedom. That work is as challenging as any mountain pilgrimage. We need each other's encouragement to be faithful companions as we journey with Jesus on the road to His Fathers' Kingdom.

Via De Cristo is really about getting people who have been identified as leaders in their churches into a Fourth Day environment that will support them in their roles as leaders. The reunion group is the primary element in the Fourth Day; the Ultreya is the glue that binds the larger community together.

- Section and Title:** **V. FOURTH DAY REINFORCEMENTS**
 B. SERVANT OPPORTUNITIES
 1. Environment and Community
 2. Weekend Team
 3. Secretariat
- Length:** **10 minutes**
- Suggested Presenter:** **Member of Secretariat**

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY

What are some servant opportunities in your environment and community? Study your work, home, recreation, and educational environments. You can make a difference in the environments where you are a member. Do you laugh at off-color jokes or racial/ethnic slams? Let it be known that you don't approve of these. Do you vote during elections? Do you attend PTAs, church council meetings, local Via de Cristo secretariat meetings, or school board meetings? Do you know your school system's agenda for education? Are you involved in furthering your education at church or in public life? Via de Cristo will help the pilgrims/candidates see that the way to be enriched is to be apostles for Jesus Christ and an enriching influence in their environments.

After the weekend, you return to the same world, but with a new enthusiasm. There are many things that can be done within your local church and community. You can join Bible studies, become active in church committees, and become more aware of your Christian calling. You can also donate your God-given talents to various community organizations.

The progression of the weekend shows the pilgrims/candidates that there is a larger Via de Cristo community. On Thursday and Friday, only the team is visible; but during the weekend, the pilgrim/candidate's circle of friends grows from self to table, to rollo room, to everyone on the weekend. Then on Saturday the Via de Cristo community shows up to serenade them. And on Sunday an even larger Via de Cristo community shows up for the closing. So the Via de Cristo community progresses from a few to a multitude.

WEEKEND TEAM

How is a team formed? The local secretariat establishes procedures and guidelines for selecting the rector, and for how the team members are selected. The head spiritual director usually selects the pastors for the weekends.

In some movements, those interested in serving on a team are asked to submit an application and are chosen from the list of applicants. In other movements, team members are selected from a list of the total Via de Cristo community within the Secretariat that is given to the rector or other person/activity responsible for selecting the team. In addition, some movements require team members to have attended leadership training schools prior to serving on a team.

Man does not create the team - God does. The team is called to create an atmosphere of openness and freedom on the weekend. During the team preparation, the team needs to work toward a creating a community.

What is the role of each person on the weekend, and why is it important? Why do we have team meetings? The most important reason is to form a Christian community; another reason is to pray for each other and the pilgrims/candidates; and, the third is to work out the details of each person's responsibilities. There is work to be done before the weekend. You cannot have a successful team with strangers.

Through prayer, lots of prayer, the person(s) responsible select the team members with the help of the Holy Spirit. The selections are made from people who are active, committed Christians, loving and open to others, committed to forming a community with the team, and who have experience with grouping, i.e., active in group reunions - in short, those who are living the message of the Via de Cristo weekend.

The rector's job is to take a diverse team - young and old, married and unmarried, quiet and loud, people from various walks of life with differing gifts, and from different congregations - and form them into a loving, caring Christian community ready to serve the pilgrims/candidates. During the weekend, the team members need to continue to empty themselves in order to love the pilgrims/candidates. The team is the quiet witness of Christian community in action, and as such, becomes a role model for Christian Community in action for the pilgrims/candidates. The rector needs the team to recognize the established dynamics of the weekend. This helps draw the team into unity, as they understand the spiritual theme of each day and how it fits into the progression of the weekend: Friday-God and me, Saturday-Christ in thee and me, and Sunday-Christ through me in the community.

SERVANT OPPORTUNITIES OF TEAM SERVICE

What are some servant opportunities of the weekend team? The team members are expected to commit to attend all team meetings; prepare spiritually, emotionally, and physically for weekend; pray for the participants and team; and commit themselves to reunion groups and ultreyas. If you are asked to serve on a team, you need to prayerfully consider whether you have the necessary time to commit to all the team meetings, the ultreyas and serenades, and also the time for study and prayer in preparation for the weekend.

The main preparation of individual team members is to pray, to understand and develop a servant attitude, and then to become a servant. The team members need to build team unity, help train new team members, review individual duties, and affirm team responsibilities. Table leaders need to be trained in table dynamics; professors must be taught how to write and present the rollos. We learn to critique the rollos lovingly, remembering that each rollo has a distinct purpose and that different presentation/content techniques/styles are required to meet that purpose. We also become familiar with the physical facilities, and know the location of supplies.

The whole team is a part of the pilgrims'/candidates' experiencing God's gentle, warm, total love for them. As a whole, the team is the channel of God's love and grace to the pilgrims/candidates. God's love cannot flow through us to the pilgrims/candidates if we are too full of ourselves. We are to demonstrate to them, in action, the joy of being part of a caring Christian community. In summary, the team as a whole is there to serve the pilgrims/candidates, to be channels of God's love and grace to them, to witness to Christ through their actions and words, and to witness to the strength of the Christian community in their lives.

A major function of the weekend is to teach the pilgrims/candidates the importance of the Christian fellowship by being models of the strength that comes from grouping. We need to let them know how our group reunion helps us to grow spiritually, gives us courage to be a witness for Christ, and helps us to learn to love one another.

SERVICE THROUGH AND ON THE SECRETARIAT

What are some servant opportunities involved through service within the secretariat? The secretariat is the name given to the local leadership body charged with the life and direction of the ministry. It accepts the responsibility to understand and guard both the method and the identity of Via de Cristo. It is further responsible for identifying environments to be penetrated and for developing plans to do so. The members are selected from the Via de Cristo community and are commissioned to direct, coordinate, inspire, and serve the ministry so that both they and the Via de Cristo can in turn serve the life and ministry of the church.

The secretariat meetings are open to anyone wanting to learn about the Via de Cristo movement as well as how and why it does its ministry.

All leaders in the secretariat should have demonstrated, through their service to their church and their diligence in working in the Via de Cristo movement, their commitment to Jesus Christ.

The secretariat members are responsible for all aspects of the ministry's activities. By responsible, it is not meant they perform every task. They delegate tasks to leaders in various churches and oversee their effectiveness.

Section and Title: VI. PREPARATION OF PILGRIMS/CANDIDATES AND SPONSORSHIP

A. Who Should/Should Not Attend

B. Responsibilities of Sponsors (Before, During and After Weekend)

Length: 15 minutes

Suggested Presenter: Pre-weekend chairperson from the secretariat

WHO SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT ATTEND

Who **should not** attend a weekend? Via de Cristo is not a “fix-it” experience. Be reluctant to invite people who are experiencing or have recently experienced a life crisis. The weekend is not designed to deal with such things as recent divorces and or deaths, alcohol or drug problems, or emotionally unstable persons. When people are dealing with psychological problems and we put them into an emotionally draining weekend, we may be risking their emotional health. Consider also the effect on others who are attending the weekend - especially those who are at that person’s table. Often, so much energy is spent “care-taking” such an individual, everyone else at the table is short-changed. It is probably wiser to delay inviting such a person until the crisis has passed.

Who **should** attend a Via de Cristo weekend? Most people in our environment can be considered as potential participants for a weekend; however, guard against having a majority of the participants there just because they are available, *i.e.*, “can go”. It would be much easier to invite everyone we meet to make a weekend than to pursue our responsibility to study our environments, identify the leaders of the environment, and pray for God’s guidance in doing so. Look for persons who can be further motivated - set on fire, people who will be leaders in the church and act as salt, light, and leaven. It is a good idea to try to involve several persons from the same environment (or church) in order to avoid having a participant end up being a “lone ranger”.

Haphazard and/or random selection of pilgrims/candidates is neither desirable nor wise. In Via de Cristo, we often find that failure to plan is to deny the Holy Spirit’s Lordship in critical areas. We must place a heavy emphasis on prayer-filled planning. The first planned step is to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any particular environments in which God wishes us to work. (Acts 16:7-10)

When we refer to “environments” we are speaking of the many specific settings where Christians find themselves: at home, on the job, at leisure, in the Church, and maybe even a specific geographical setting. We then study each environment prayerfully. Where will we have the most significant impact on the largest number of people? What systems have the greatest power to influence the lives of the most people? Are there already significant Christian leaders available and how well are they mobilized?

After selecting a specific environment, we begin to seek out natural leaders. We begin by looking for a positive atmosphere where people seem to be happy, giving, generous. Are the binding forces positive? Now, among those with positive binding forces, who are the leaders? Who seems to alter the atmosphere most quickly when arriving? These will likely be the first people to approach.

Once you have identified the leaders or potential leaders in those environments, try to become friends with them. Then pray for clear guidance as to which of your new friends to invite to a weekend. We usually try to help each friend understand the gifts they have received from Christ in their baptism. We help them understand the special problems and possibilities within the environments to which they belong. We present Christianity as a valid answer to the specific dilemmas that new circumstances are forcing on people. The pilgrim/candidate for the weekend should be a baptized Christian, reasonably stable and mature, with a desire for God's love, and a zeal to do God's work in the Church and in the world. Do you see Christ in this person? The weekend is for people who already have a committed faith and are looking to renew and grow in that commitment. They may doubt it, but you see them as leaders. People who have depth to their personality, an ability to make decisions, a healthy independence and a natural affinity for giving love would be excellent pilgrims/candidates.

Those who go to a Via de Cristo weekend should have strength of character and self-control, and be able to make their own decisions. They should be self-starters and/or movers within their environments. They should be concerned about the social conditions of our times. They should be 'others'-oriented to the extent that they have the ability and desire to live in, and for, the community. They should desire to grow spiritually. They should want to discover their gifts and use them for the good of the community.

It is important for the pilgrims/candidates to be open to being transformed by Christ and becoming active in the work of bringing others to Him; it is not just to go on a nice weekend to experience God's love. Remember that they can actually be in a reunion group and attend ultreyas without ever attending the weekend.

Share with them that the Via de Cristo may mean attaining something they desire—a new closeness to Christ, attaining better knowledge of Christ, and becoming better servants of Christ.

How to get them to say yes? The simple, direct, straightforward method of inviting them to reunion groups and ultreyas and "get them curious" approach works. Explain the Fourth Day. Explain your own relationship with Christ and how it has been fed through your Fourth Day practice of small group reunions and applying yourself to your piety, study, and action. Be excited about your Fourth Day. Remember that getting them to make a commitment to spread the Good News is the objective of the weekend. If you can get them committed and excited about evangelizing their environments without going to a weekend, you have still accomplished the purpose.

Tell them what you have gotten out of Via de Cristo and what it meant to you. Tell them you think they would enjoy it. Make sure you inform your friend about the weekend; don't make Via de Cristo seem like a secret society. Answer all questions and keep the spouse informed. Don't build up expectations about what they will experience or what they will get out of the weekend because it may be different for them.

What do you tell a pilgrim/candidate about the weekend? Be open about what goes on because secretiveness can be counterproductive; trust the Holy Spirit! We should explain Via de Cristo in such a way that they will become enthusiastic about it. If they ask questions, do not hesitate to give them an honest answer even if it means telling what you consider to be one of the neat surprises of the weekend. If they want to know EVERYTHING, that is OK. They will forget most of it, OR will not understand what it means, or will NOT know when it is going to happen on the weekend.

When we explain the weekend, we can assure persons that they may ask and be told anything they want to know about it. The weekend is not theoretical but a pragmatic, lived experience that is oriented to the Church and to community life. The sponsors do the preparation of the pilgrims/candidates. All sponsors must be prepared in every way to assist the participant's assimilation into the Fourth Day, *i.e.*, a group reunion, ultreyas, and additional training - whatever it takes!

In closing, remember we should not invite pilgrims/candidates for our glory or to increase the number of people from our area. God is the one calling the pilgrims/candidates; we are only His instruments who are charged with handling the details of getting them to the weekend. Sponsoring is a privilege and responsibility that we do for the glory of God.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SPONSORS (BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER WEEKEND)

What are the responsibilities of the community and of the sponsor? Sponsorship is an ongoing commitment for the sponsors and the community. The community must have a sense of themselves recognizing that they are a part of Christ's body, the church. They must be ready to accept new pilgrims/candidates and provide prayer, before, during and after the weekend.

They should write a letter and provide any other support that would help the pilgrim/candidate get to the weekend with a clear conscience. Via de Cristo is a beautiful, successful tool of the Lord to bring people to Him in a deeper way and to motivate them in turn to bring others to Christ. The sponsor must take responsibility for the perseverance of the pilgrim/candidate until (s)he is fully incorporated into his or her own Christian community. That means getting them into a reunion group and bringing them to the Ultreyas until they feel comfortable in the community.

QUICK SUMMARY OF SPONSOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Before the weekend, pray about whom to ask. Inform potential pilgrims/candidates about everything they need to know. Please don't be secretive. Answer all questions honestly so they trust you. Even if they know everything, the weekend will be meaningful. Some key points are: the weekend is isolated from the world, leave electronic devices home, there will be worship services with communion, and talks will be given and discussed. Let them know they will be home late Sunday so the family doesn't worry. Help the pilgrim/candidate fill out his or her application, making sure the pastor signs it. Then send your completed sponsor's form, the pilgrim/candidate's application form, and the non-refundable registration fee (if required by your movement) to the Pre-weekend chair. If possible, get family and spouse letters and any other letters to the send-off site on Thursday of the weekend. Make arrangements to get your pilgrim/candidate to the send-off. Try not to appear to want control, but rather that you are offering assistance.

During the weekend, assist the family with any needs while the pilgrim/candidate is gone. Do they need babysitting, food brought in, transportation, etc.? Pray, Pray, Pray. Go to the serenade site early so you can pray for the pilgrims/candidates and practice your singing. Let the spouse or family know whom to contact in case of emergency. Encourage people from your community to attend the serenade, especially if your spouse is attending the weekend and you are not supposed to be at the serenade. Arrive early at the closing so you can pray for everyone's safe arrival and prepare for the new pilgrims/candidates. Make sure you get your pilgrim/candidate home safely after the Clausura. Answer any questions they might have after the weekend.

The most crucial part comes after the weekend - getting them into a reunion group, the real purpose of the Via de Cristo weekend. Within the reunion group, the spiritual thrust from the weekend has someplace to go and be reinforced. It is within the reunion group that the potential to become the living backbone that animates human community. It is here that Christ can be experienced within community. It is the training ground, the support group, and the place of encouragement with accountability.

Assist the new pilgrim/candidate in finding a reunion group, even if it means you need to start a new one for awhile. Bring the new pilgrim/candidate to the next Ultreya and leaders training. Continue to be there for them.

- Section and Title:** **VII. HISTORY**
- A. History of Cursillo®**
 - B. History of Via de Cristo**
 - C. Local History**

Length: **15 minutes**

HISTORY OF CURSILLO®

Since Via de Cristo is based on the Cursillo® methodology, the history of Cursillo® will be described first.

The roots of Cursillo® can be traced back to the Roman Catholic Church in the 1940's on the island of Majorca, Spain. The Catholic Action for Young Men, the organized apostalate, wanted to participate in a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James (a great pilgrimage center of the Middle Ages) located in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. To prepare leaders for this pilgrimage the group offered "*Little Courses for Pilgrim Leaders.*" The Catholic Action for Young Men had a vitally important goal in conducting this pilgrimage. Although the Spanish Civil War had ended in 1939, the war left the nation and the church bloodied and divided. They wished to bring healing to church and nation. The spirit of pilgrimage is a spirit or attitude of movement against "lukewarm" religiosity. It is also a spirit of community among fellow pilgrims who strive together to live fully devoted to Christ. The aftermath of the Civil War and then the havoc of World War II repeatedly delayed the pilgrimage. They were finally able to hold it in 1948.

The literal translation of Cursillo® is "little course;" because the Cursillo® Movement evolved out of the "*Little Courses for Pilgrimage Leaders.*" The monastery of St. Honorato in Majorca held the first Cursillo® in January 1949, and it was surprisingly similar to the present-day weekends. It was open only to the young Spanish men of Catholic Action. The courses were so effective that later it was decided to offer the Cursillo® to other young men without requiring a commitment to Catholic Action.

The Cursillo® Movement was not an accident of fate, nor was it a clever human product. A group of faithful Christian men dedicated themselves to introducing the younger men of their city to Jesus Christ. They prayed, studied and talked together as a team. In the light of God's Word, they discussed the state of the world and the effectiveness of their effort to bring the light of Christ to it. By grace, God revealed to them a method that has proven effective and fruitful. Do not imagine it came easily. It took many years of effort within the Christian community and diligent prayer by the renewal movements within the church.

In 1950 Eduardo Bonnin resigned from Catholic Action to become the chairman of Cursillo®. Supported by his bishop, Juan Hervas, they worked together to clarify the method and defend the movement from its critics. It is a verification of God's grace that even the opposition assisted the founders by forcing clarity of thought and the avoidance of variations.

The Cursillo® Movement remained largely a local effort in Majorca until about 1953. The original leaders had remained there working together, praying together and hammering out the basic understandings of Cursillo®. Group reunions, three-day weekends, ultreyas, leaders groups and team meetings, each evolved in a systematic way. In 1955, Bishop Hervas was transferred from Majorca, and he took the idea of the Cursillo® Movement with him. Other early leaders also helped spread the movement as they were called away from Majorca.

There was a lady in Barcelona who was the backbone of Christianity in her family. Her husband made a Cursillo® weekend and returned to his family a greatly changed man. He began to assume spiritual leadership in the family although that role had previously belonged to his wife. As she said, “I don’t understand him now!” Since the family members were friends of the Cardinal of Terrogona, this lady went to the Cardinal and told him, “I have a saint at home. You must start Cursillo® for women, or I am going to end up divorcing my husband.”

Today the Cursillo® Movement is worldwide. From Spain it moved to Latin America where the first Cursillo® for women was held. By 1983 there were centers in nearly all South and Central American countries, Canada, Mexico, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Great Britain, Ireland, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Australia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and several African countries.

Father Gabriel Hernandez had experienced the Cursillo® in Spain under two founders of the movement, Eduardo Bonnin and Father Juan Capo. He moved to Waco, Texas in 1955. In 1957 two Spanish airmen, Bernardo Vadell and Augustin Palomino, were in training with the United States Air Force. Together the priest and airmen formed a team and conducted the first United States weekend in May of 1957. They continued to assist groups hold weekends across Texas. In 1959 the Movement expanded into Arizona, and in 1960, into the East at New York City and Lorain, Ohio. The movement spread quickly to California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, and New Mexico. The first English speaking weekend was held in San Angelo, Texas in 1961. The National Catholic Secretariat was organized at a 1965 meeting in Kansas City. By 1981 most of the Roman Catholic dioceses had introduced the Cursillo® Movement.

The Catholic Cursillo® community assisted other church bodies in holding similar weekends. The Episcopalians use the name “Cursillo®,” the United Methodists use the name “Walk to Emmaus,” and the Lutherans use the name “Via de Cristo.” There are some inter-church efforts, “Tres Dias”, and a prison effort called “Kairos.”

HISTORY OF THE LUTHERAN VIA DE CRISTO

Via de Cristo (a Spanish term meaning “Way of Christ”) is the Lutheran ecumenical movement that grew out of the Cursillo® movement.

Two Lutheran movements began in 1972, each unknown to the other. Florida began with Spiritual Director Pastor Edward Simonsen and held its weekends in Miami. Iowa began with Spiritual Directors, Pastor Gene Hermeier for the men’s weekend, and Pastor Allen Hermeier for the women’s weekend; these weekends were held in Atlantic, Iowa. Each group adapted the Cursillo® method with modifications for Lutheran use; and, with assistance from Catholic and Episcopal leaders, each began to grow. The groups discovered one another “by chance” at a national church convention and combined their efforts to host a weekend in Chicago in 1976. By 1979 there were several Lutheran movements expressing interest in a national body for the Lutherans. Invitations were sent to all known Lutheran movements to meet in January 1981. The leaders came together at Cross and Crown Lutheran Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Assisted by Bishop David Wolber of the American Lutheran Church, the newly formed Southeastern District documented their desires and wrote the first draft of the National Lutheran Secretariat Constitution.

It is fundamental to the Cursillo® Movement that all movements maintain a close affiliation with the Church. In the 1980’s, because of the extensive spread of the movement and the many variations that were springing up, the Roman Catholic National Secretariat began attempts to enforce this church affiliation. They began requiring any movement that wished to use the not-as-yet registered name, Cursillo®, to hold weekends for same-faith participants only. In 1983, during a meeting in Coral Gables, Florida, the President of the National Secretariat of the Cursillo® Movement, Gerry Hughes, came to the National Lutheran Secretariat (NLS) meeting. If NLS would agree to hold weekends for Lutherans only they would be licensed to use the name Cursillo®. Through its next four meetings the NLS deliberated in great agony on the decision. Finally in February 1986, at the winter meeting held at St. Michael Lutheran Church in Ottawa Lake, Michigan, the NLS decided that their commitment to ecumenism outweighed their attachment to the name Cursillo®, and they adopted the name Via de Cristo. Although the NLS does not require local movements to change their name in order to affiliate with them, they do suggest “Via de Cristo.” Most affiliated movements have adopted it. By 1997, only twenty-five years after the first Lutheran weekends began, there were forty secretariats serving in over twenty-one states that were affiliated with NLS.

LOCAL HISTORY

Many, or most, in attendance today probably went on one of our Via de Cristo weekends. We will now give you a brief history of how, why and when we originated this ministry.

(Your local secretariat history goes here)

References: NLS Leader’s Manual and the booklet, “*Interview With Eduardo Bonnin*”