

Guidelines

What a Cursillo talk IS:

Each of the fifteen talks is one episode in an unfolding story. Each builds on those gone before, and serves to provoke discussion and exploration of the topic. It asks questions rather than trying to give answers.

What a Cursillo talk IS NOT:

A personal witness talk – it is anchored in, but not all about, the speaker's experience.

A lesson – apart from a few of the final talks, it's not for the speaker to tell people what to do.

A Bible study – Bible quotes should be used sparingly, and only where relevant.

A sermon – it's not an opportunity for the speaker to try to sound like the vicar!

So how do I do that?

Read the guidelines for the talk you are to prepare. Don't leap in and start right away, however tempting that may be. Give yourself time to think and pray, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking. You may be surprised to find how God will put things into your mind if you keep it open. The guidelines come in three sections:

1.Key points:

The guidelines for each talk will give a few key points that **MUST** be incorporated in your talk in some way. Without these, other talks may not make full sense, and the unfolding story mentioned above will be broken. Start by taking these away and thinking about them for as long as needed before you even start to try to write anything. As the old collect prayer says, “read, mark, and inwardly digest.”

2.Suggestions:

Suggestions are offered as a way of getting you going. They are not as crucial as the key points, and you can use them or not as seems appropriate.

3.Comments:

The comments are just helpful notes about the process, including things to avoid. Some things are the same for many talks, others may be pertinent only to your talk.

Don't apologise! Too many “study” talks have begun with “*Well, I don't know why I've been given this talk to do because I'm the world's worst at studying.*” Usually, that person then goes on to list the fifteen books they read before breakfast and make everyone else feel even worse. It's not a competition, and neither is the talk an opportunity to show off. Yes, we want to share our own personal experience and what works for me, but with understanding, and sympathetic to the fact that for others their journey may well have a different direction and speed. Having said that, the best talks – and the ones that people remember – do arise naturally out of personal experience, and are not just a sterile third-person monologue. Striking a balance comes naturally to some, but others may find this very challenging. If you find yourself just getting stuck, don't panic – it doesn't mean you're inadequate, just stuck. Talk to other Cursillistas about it, perhaps after your Group Reunion. Even if your ideas are really sketchy, run them past one of the Spiritual Advisors for the weekend, who may be able to give you pointers or other support. It may seem daunting to think that “*Christ is counting on YOU,*” but he never asks more of us than we are able to do, so we respond in faith, “*and I on HIM.*” Ultreya!

Talk 1: “Ideal”

Key points:

- ◆ We are all aiming for something in life: we all have key values.
- ◆ Our *ideal* motivates everything we do and how we do it.
- ◆ We might never have thought about what our *ideal* may be, but here we have the opportunity and space to do so.
- ◆ We form and change our *ideal* over time in response to experience.

Suggestions:

- It's quite important **not** to mention God or religion in this talk. Why? Because it gives people a 'hook to hang' their thoughts on: if we can say that *our ideal is Jesus Christ*, then we can stop searching our own souls.
- Our *ideal* is made up of hopes, aspirations and beliefs that come from all sorts of sources. It starts with our parents or carers, and goes on through the people and circumstances we live with. Some of it is deliberate – we think it through and decide to adopt ideas – but much of it is unconscious. It's the unconscious values we're trying to tease out mainly here.
- There's a really difficult balance to find between making this talk too theoretical or too personal. We can point to our own *ideal*, and how it may have changed over the years, but (like the above) we don't want to plant seeds of ideas that divert the hearer's thinking. It may help to share your ideas with someone else if you are worried about this balance.
- Top tip: ask the hearers to think first about what they **think** their *ideal* is, but then mentally to evaluate what takes up most of their time, most of their money, and most of their concern every day. What we **think** and what we **actually** live out can be very different.

Comments:

This first talk sets the scene for those that will follow. It's unique in that it focuses on the deep core values of the individual within, whereas every talk that follows explores relationships outside of ourselves – with God and others. The best *ideal* talks really stimulate the hearers to self-examination, but do so in an engaging and personable way. A little wit and humour can lighten the delivery, but we must be careful not to trivialise the message in an attempt to make it more palatable.

Talk 2: “Grace” (Clergy)

Key points:

- ◆ Grace is the undeserved free gift of God's love – we cannot earn it.
- ◆ Grace is freely available to all, but we consciously choose to accept or reject it.

Suggestions:

- After the last talk we looked at what forms our *ideal*. Now we might consider what God's *ideal* might be.
- It's important to focus on what God is doing through grace, and not move too far into what our response to grace is – the talks later on *Faith* and *Life in Grace* deal with this.
- The emphasis is on the all-encompassing nature of grace; that it is freely given and freely available to all. Deep within us all is an expectation that we must *earn* God's grace by our conscious response to it, but the whole *raison d'être* of the Cursillo revolves around modelling and demonstrating the overwhelming love of God.

Comments:

“*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us.*” (1John 4.10) The Pelagian heresy* is insidious. It appeals naturally to our inbuilt sense of fairness and *quid-pro-quo* desire for what we see as justice. There may well be those listening who have never questioned a whole way of life based on “if I'm good, God will like me.” To hear that God's love is equally shared with sinners and saints alike may be deeply disturbing. Overcoming a sense of unworthiness at our own shortcomings is beyond the scope of this short talk, but we can at least provoke a response and a questioning.

**Pelagianism is a theological position that holds that the original sin did not taint human nature and that humans have the free will to achieve human perfection by their own efforts and without divine grace.*

Talk 3: “Laity”

Key points:

- ◆ The Laity **are** the Church.
- ◆ The 'Body of Christ' (the Church) is made up of many unique and important members.
- ◆ The clergy may *represent* the Church, but the Laity are the “church” most people meet.

Suggestions:

- We are the people who have the person of Christ at centre of our *ideal*, and have opened our hearts to the *grace* of God.
- It is within the community of the Church that we are nurtured and empowered to live in grace in the rest of our lives.
- Each part of the human body exists to serve the whole body in some way; and each member of the laity is in the body of Christ to play their part in the overall mission of the church, not simply to find what they personally can get from it.

Comments:

Some confusion can arise over the use of the word *laity*. It is true that we are all – whether ordained or not – the “laos,” or “people of God,” but this talk uses the term in its more conventional meaning to differentiate the 'ordinary' church members from the clergy (and others in religious orders.) Over several centuries of having professional clergy who were often in years gone by drawn from the ranks of the educated and privileged, the Anglican Church became typically to be represented by a village parish where the Vicar did everything in church, and the laity's job was just to turn up and listen. This impression is deeply rooted in our national conscience, and the main thrust of this talk is to inspire the listeners to realise again that we are all not just passive but active members of the Body of Christ.

Talk 4: “Faith”

Key points:

- ◆ Faith is how we respond in love to God's love.
- ◆ Faith is not something you 'have,' but something you 'do.'
- ◆ Faith is not instantaneous, it is expressed over time.
- ◆ Faith is not just a set of beliefs.

Suggestions:

- Modelling our *ideal* on the values of Christ, and accepting the overwhelming *grace* of God, we meet as the “laos,” (*laity*) to exercise our response to God: through *faith*.
- Faith is not just about acceptance of Jesus as Lord, it is about living our lives under his Lordship, and in particular exactly **how** we do that.
- A key way to understand *faith* is to examine what it means to be *faithful*.
- There are talks to come that will spell out in greater detail some of the aids to a life of faith that Cursillo can help with in the future.

Comments:

Faith is a word closely related to, but not the same as, *belief* and *trust*. Interestingly, both *belief* and *trust* have associated verbs – *to believe*, and *to trust*, - but there is no equivalent verb “*to faith*” even though the very heart of faith is that it is expressed through practice.

Hebrews 11 reminds us that “*faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,*” and that “*what is seen was made from things that are not visible*” This does not mean that Christian faith is “blind faith,” an arbitrary trust and belief in something that amounts to no more than wishful thinking. We believe and trust in the promises of God, supremely exemplified in Christ, and we accept in humility that his word deserves a *faithful* response.

This talk often concludes with the introduction to the concept of *palanca*. The link needs to be made that *palanca* comes from those who wish to physically express their life in faith through assuring our new Cursillistas of their prayerful concern and love for them.

Talk 5: “Piety”

Key points:

- ◆ Piety is doing all we can to listen to God, and to draw close to him.
- ◆ Piety is not just “prayer,” and certainly not just “intercession.”
- ◆ Piety is the first of our three key elements: *piety*, *study* and *action*. (*to follow!*)

Suggestions:

- The word “piety” (or “pious”) can provoke very negative ideas. It's not about showing off our “religiousness,” or turning our noses up at other people. At its simplest, it's about how we find it best to spend time in communion with God. That can be in silence or meditation, free prayer or structured liturgy. We're all different, but God is the same.
- Don't forget we are in the “looking inward” phase. Your talk is an invitation to participants to examine their own relationship with God, not necessarily to recommend new ideas or strategies to them – this comes later in other talks.
- Because we are all different, this talk will be the first one to be potentially deeply personal. It will very likely involve sharing things that “make us tick,” but we need to keep in mind that what works for us may not be helpful for others.
- At the heart of *piety* is an understanding that we are not talking about prayer as a separate activity; *piety* is the way we allow God to be a part of every part of our daily lives.

Comments:

On some Cursillos in the past this talk has been given in a different way and a different place from all the others – for example in the retreat house chapel. While at first this may seem like a good idea, it actually undermines the whole premise of the talk! Piety is one leg of our three-legged stool of *piety-study-action* and is integral to every aspect of our life, not separated from it as somehow made “holy,” and therefore disconnected. Anything that reinforces the prejudice that *piety* is something we only do in church is not just undermining this talk – it undermines the whole message of the Cursillo.

Piety, then, is all about how we approach our relationship with God. We

heard in the second meditation about how God wants to have a loving relationship with all of his children – even the prodigal son – and building on this parent-child model of relationship can be useful. Not all family relationships are comfortable areas to explore for some participants, so care is needed, but we can stress that we speak of a perfect parent who transcends in every way our own human parents. Alternatively we can look at human friendships: can we imagine a friendship being in any way deep and meaningful if we never talk to each other or spend any time in each others' company?

Although the talk on *obstacles to grace* is yet to come, it may be helpful to point out at this early stage that like all relationships, our *piety* won't always be comfortable or rewarding. There are times when we may not feel God's presence, or anything at all. There will be busy times when we need to force ourselves to make time for God. It is comforting to know at such times that even the great saints of history had their *dark night of the soul*.

Talk 6: “Study”

Key points:

- ◆ God has given us all an in-built curiosity, and a desire to learn
- ◆ We learn through many ways – not just reading books
- ◆ Study is not just for our own benefit: it equips us for service

Suggestions:

- If we are living a life in *piety* we will be open to hearing what God wants to say and seeing what he wants to show us. This is *study*.
- God has created us in his image, with heads as well as hearts. He wants to help us grow in faith as his children. Opting out of expecting to learn because we don't think we're clever enough is to deny God's handiwork in us.
- The Bible is vitally important to us as God's written word, but *study* is not only *Bible Study*. We can learn from God through books, films and TV, sermons in church, conversations with others – the list is endless because God chooses unique ways to communicate with each of us. Not all study is through inanimate objects - we can learn from others about their response to God's call to service.
- *Piety* alone is not enough to make us true disciples; but our *piety* leads us to be open to *study* what God is showing us, to equip us for useful, active service.
- This talk is not just an opportunity to tell everyone about the best book I've ever read!0

Comments:

The word *study* may well be as off-putting to your hearers as was *piety*. There will be those, of course, who relish reading and learning, but there will be others for whom the word conjures up painful memories of poor school reports or difficult impositions at work involving reams of paperwork. There is a delicate balance to be struck here between emphasising that *study* in this Cursillo context is a joyful, even playful exploration of new and exciting truths in our faith, and yet can best be taken advantage of through some level of order and planning. Reference to Bible study notes and Bible reading plans can help, but do beware of implying that *study* = *Bible study*: a plan to read a book or watch a series about any topic with a Christian dimension can be beneficial. Introducing the notion of organised study

helps pave the way for the later talk on *Group Reunion*.

Talk 7: “Sacraments”

Key points:

- ◆ Sacraments are vehicles of God's grace.
- ◆ Sacraments are ways in which the church over the years has come to recognise a common experience of divine action.
- ◆ There are differences of opinion across Christendom about how many 'official' sacraments there are, but generally a common understanding of what one is.
- ◆ Not all Christians give equal weight to the importance of sacrament.

Suggestions:

- The formal definition of a sacrament is: “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”.
- The two 'undisputed' sacraments are Baptism and Eucharist
- The efficacy of a sacrament is not reliant on the skill of the minister, or the understanding of the recipient.

Comments:

This talk does not benefit from being used as a flag-waving exercise about different churchmanship. To place it in the appropriate context of the flow of the talks it needs to sensitively explore the concept of divine activity (grace) being seen as active in tangible human activities, some of which in various ways are recognised as held in common in our various understandings.

Rather than focussing on the easy business of enumerating all seven (Catholic) sacraments and identifying what in each is the *outward sign* and what the *inward grace*, it may be more helpful (but more difficult) to invite exploration of a wider application of a *sacramental* understanding of how to identify the divine at work in the ordinary.

Eucharist is often seen as the supreme sacrament, as in it Jesus himself is present. It may be useful to note that we may come to the table with differing appreciations of exactly how and where that presence is to be found, but we agree that we experience through it a special encounter.

Talk 8: “Action”

Key points:

- ◆ *Piety* and *Study* are essentially selfish if they don't lead to *Action*.
- ◆ Through *Action* we become the “hands and feet of Christ in the world.”
- ◆ *Action* in a Cursillo context is *Apostolic Action*

Suggestions:

- Piety, Study and Action are like the legs of a three-legged stool: nothing is more stable than a three-legged stool when all three legs are equal and balanced.
- The word *Apostolic* comes from the Greek, meaning *one who is sent*. An apostolic action is then anything we believe through our *piety* and *study* to be something God has sent us to do. We can be wrong of course, and this is one reason why sharing our ideas and thoughts with fellow Christians is important. We will learn more of this later (Group Reunion)
- What God sends us to do will depend on many things: what gifts we have, where we are, who else is there, and so on. We may be asked to do things alone, or in company with others (Christian Community in Action)
- What we are sent to do may not even make sense to us at the time, but may be part of God's longer plan. We are called to be faithful, not necessarily successful. We don't have to know how to 'do' *action*, the Holy Spirit is our guide.
- The greatest action we can be involved in is to encourage another into deeper relationship with God: *make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Jesus*.

Comments:

Possibly even more than the other talks so far, this talk hangs on sharing our own experience of how we have heard the call of God to apostolic action in our own life. If we can point to incidences where we feel God has clearly been at work in sending us into a situation, then the subject becomes more real to our hearers. It must be made very clear that such stories are only examples, and not blueprints for others to follow. We must also be wary of presenting ourselves as such a model of apostolic action that others are left feeling hopelessly inadequate!

Talk 9: “Obstacles to Grace”

Key points:

- ◆ All Christians encounter obstacles in their life of grace, and it's not a sign of personal failure or weakness.
- ◆ Temptation itself is not sin; sin is knowingly departing from God's way.
- ◆ Temptation is not from God.

Suggestions:

- Sin leads to alienation from God. This does not mean that he loves us less, it means that his love is 'blocked' by ourselves.
- Obstacles arise from living in a society with un-Godly values (*the World*); from our human instincts and desires (*the Flesh*); and directly from forces of evil (*the devil*.)
- Overcoming *obstacles to grace* is not automatic: there are things that can help us, but ultimately it depends on us to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in overcoming them.

Comments:

It would be the stuff of fairy tales to imagine that once we accepted Jesus as Lord, the whole of our lives would be carried forward on a floating cushion of protection from all evil. It is the experience of most Christians that the more you put your head above the parapet and strive towards God, the more you experience opposition from the evil one. You might say that if you're not bothered about God then satan doesn't need to be bothered about you. So, it's important that we realise that if when we leave this Cursillo time together we do so with renewed enthusiasm, we may also expect and be ready to recognise such opposition.

This should not be daunting! We will carry forward not just St Paul's armour (Eph.6) but some new Cursillo ideas and techniques to help us unleash the power of the Holy Spirit to defeat the enemy. Remember – there may be battles still to fight, but the war has already been won by Christ on the cross.

Talk 10: “Leaders”

Key points:

- ◆ What is a *Leader*? Someone who influences others by their words or actions – regularly or even occasionally.
- ◆ We are all therefore *Leaders* at various times and places in our lives. What we do and say may shape the lives of others
- ◆ Not all leadership is 'upfront' or obvious.

Suggestions:

- It may be helpful to select one or two examples of your own Christian journey when you have been “led” by others – especially if these are unexpected or unusual.
- It is important that we recognise that leadership is not restricted to those given special authority to lead. We can note sometimes that so-and-so took the lead in a certain situation, for whatever reason.
- The particular leadership we are looking at in this talk arises out of *Apostolic Action* arising from *Piety and Study*.
- The call to *take a lead* is easily ignored out of a sense of fear or unworthiness. We need to trust the Holy Spirit!

Comments:

One significant pitfall with this talk is overlapping with the *Action* talk given earlier, or the talks that follows this on *Study and evangelisation of environments* and *Christian Community in action*. While personal experiences are valuable in explaining the concept of leadership and how it is often unexpected and apparently (to the world) undeserved, this talk needs really to focus on how leadership may have come about in a given situation, **not** how that played out and what was achieved.

Talk 11: “Study and evangelisation of environments”

Key points:

- ◆ We all live in a “Sitz im Leben” - a “setting in life,” surrounded to a greater or lesser extent by others.
- ◆ If we consciously and prayerfully examine our everyday environment we can identify ways we can play our part in making our own world more Christ-centred.
- ◆ As we learn, we can be *leaders* in bringing Christ's love to those situations.

Suggestions:

- Our very first talk (*Ideal*) encouraged us to radically appraise our own priorities in life. This talk aims to encourage us to radically assess our everyday environments, and begin to think whether and how we can be better apostles for Christ at home, in the workplace or office, at school or college...
- This talk focusses on our own individual response and action, but often that will be as part of a larger group – our church, a small team, or a larger Christian organisation. These group involvements are to be covered in talk 13 “*Christian Community in Action*,” so try to concentrate where possible on personal, individual activities.

Comments:

The word “environments” can sound somewhat daunting, and adding the word “evangelisation” is enough to make many of us give up before we've even got past the title. Yet the strangeness of the title belies the fact that this talk is about the very **ordinariness** of our everyday lives. Our “*environments*” is simply a catch-all word for every situation we encounter; and “*evangelisation*” is just representing Christ in those everyday situations. So it is not about stepping outside our usual self to launch into a Biblical tirade from a soap-box in the park – it's about being open and honest about our faith amongst those we meet. As St Francis is reputed to have said to his followers, “*go and preach the Gospel everywhere; using words only if necessary.*”

Talk 12: “Life in Grace”

Key points:

- ◆ This talk is more informational than theological.
- ◆ This is the opportunity to introduce the idea of *rule of life*, and the concept of *spiritual direction* (“*spiritual accompaniment*”, “*soul friend*”...)
- ◆ This is an opportunity to reflect on earlier talks to emphasise:
 - 1) the *piety, study, action* tripod
 - 2) the need for support and a framework as we go into the 4th Day
- ◆ This is also an opportunity to talk about the availability of personal confession, remembering *all may; some should; none must!*

Suggestions:

- Distribute and explain the *rule of life* cards.
- It's important to see the *rule of life* as a self-created measuring stick, not an external regulation. As such it can be varied when circumstances change, but it is an aid to planning and assessing our spiritual life objectively.
- Similarly, we need to stress that *spiritual direction* is not about being told what to do, but about having someone who is to some extent 'outside' our day-to-day life, and can help us to reflect and plan for ourselves.

Comments:

By this time in the Cursillo the participants may be growing weary or suffering from “input overload.” This is very unfortunate as this talk, along with *14:Group Reunion* is hugely important in outlining what is the very heart of the Cursillo method. It really needs to be emphasised that this is now “getting down to brass tacks,” handing out the tools for the job to come.

With this in mind it can be helpful if these two talks are re-visited in some way at the beginning of the post-Cursillo phase, perhaps at the first Ultreya after a Cursillo.

Talk 13: “Christian community in action”

Key points:

- ◆ We are seldom called to wholly independent action.
- ◆ A *Christian Community in Action* is any group that works together towards a joint purpose under God's guidance.
- ◆ St Paul reminds us of our interdependence as members of the body: together we achieve much more than we can alone.

Suggestions:

- The Church itself is the ultimate *Christian Community in Action*, but within that framework are many other small and large organisations, both formal and informal.
- Can you identify involvements of your own that may serve as examples?
- Cursillo provides us with a network that can resource our individual action, but also be a platform for launching group action.

Comments:

Formal examples of *Christian Communities in Action* are many and varied – the Mothers Union, the Bible Society, TearFund, CAFOD, Christian Aid, and many more. Being involved in any way with any of these can be a way of contributing our small part to the greater action. On a local level up and down the country are foodbanks, lunch clubs, children's activities and the like which are promoted and undertaken by Christians as part of their mission to their local environment. These all tend to be ongoing activities on a regular basis, but we should also recognise the many and varied occasional contributions – the special appeal to build a local community centre or new church, or just a small group of friends who decide to get together to address a local issue in some way.

Talk 14: “Group Reunion”

Key points:

- ◆ Group Reunion is the beating heart of Cursillo.
- ◆ Reunion is not just “*getting together again to talk about the past,*” it's a re-fuelling stop on the journey of life in Christ.
- ◆ Reunion groups should ideally be three or more people, and not more than six if all are to be heard.
- ◆ There are no hard and fast rules about frequency of meetings, but regularity is key to effectiveness.
- ◆ Sticking to the agreed structure of a Reunion and following the cards provides a framework that allows a genuine sharing.
- ◆ It is vital that each person has the opportunity to speak about their piety, study and action without interruption or discussion. There can be time allowed for informal conversation and discussion after the formal meeting is concluded, usually with the Cursillo *thanksgiving*.
- ◆ If all the above is observed, a proper Reunion should take no longer than 20 to 30 minutes.

Suggestions:

- It is good to begin with an explanation of the Group Reunion cards, but beware of going into too much detail. It's then helpful to have table groups (decuriae) actually practice a standard Group Reunion under the guidance of the table leaders. The sharing will be a little artificial as so much will have already been shared, but familiarity with the format is what we are aiming for here. Mention should be made of the need for confidentiality.
- It may be worth mentioning here that although Group Reunion is primarily designed for those who have had the Cursillo experience, there is no reason why non-Cursillistas should not be invited to participate. This may well be a way to encourage them to join more fully.

Comments:

“We do not have Group Reunions so that there will be people to attend a Cursillo Weekend; on the contrary, we have Cursillo Weekends so that there will be people to make Group Reunions.” (Eduardo Bonnin)

Talk 15: “Ultreya!”

Key points:

- ◆ THIS IS NOT A TALK ABOUT DIOCESAN MEETINGS!
- ◆ This talk is given by the Lay Rector, and is an opportunity to pull together any loose threads or fill any missing gaps in the previous fourteen talks.
- ◆ The primary focus is on encouraging and enthusing our new pilgrims on their onward journey – Ultreya!

Suggestions:

- Rather than a prepared talk like the rest, this talk is best prepared or at least completed over the course of the Cursillo.
- It may be helpful to confer with the Observing Lay Rector, Head Gopher and Spiritual Advisors for content.
- Pilgrims need to be assured that while some may have been deeply affected by the Cursillo experience, for others it may have been a gentler journey; but for all this has been a “mountain top” experience designed to equip us for “valley” duty.

Comments:

It is very possible that we have been changed by our Cursillo experience, but the environments at home will, by and large, be just as we left them. It is all too easy to fall back into old ways and forget the new things we have found. We want to stress that pilgrims are not returning home just to their existing environments, but have a new dimension in their lives should they choose to avail themselves of it – the Cursillo community. There will be local and National Ultreyas, and other workshops and days of deeper understanding, but above all else is the regular Group Reunion. It is particularly helpful if the diocese has a mechanism to support and encourage new Cursillistas into Groups. Encourage new pilgrims to develop their own habit of evaluating everything that happens in their daily lives from the perspective of the three-legged stool: *piety, study, action*. We hope that the Cursillo will have opened eyes to the richer life that the Fourth Day has to offer, but they need to be reminded that our watchword *Ultreya!* means *Persevere! Keep going!* - and that requires effort and commitment together and individually. Be ready to make that promise: “*Christ is counting on you – and I on him.*”

Ultreya!