

## **Table Leader 3/12/13**

Good afternoon, I think most of you know me but for those who don't, my name is Don White and I'm a member of St. Charles Borromeo parish in Hampshire. I made my Cursillo in the fall of 2002. Five and a half years ago I accepted the challenge to serve this movement as the head of the School of Leaders. This up coming January I will be passing it on to some lucky Cursillista. I must say, it has been an honor to serve this movement in this capacity and I look forward to what God has in store for me next.

Tonight, the topic of our workshop is Table Leaders. It does not matter how many talks you have given, one or fifty, it is the table leader's responsibility to understand his or her role. They must take the time to study all the available literature and resources in order to fully comprehend what it means to be an effective table leader.

Being asked to give a talk is a great honor. Many hours are spent praying, preparing and writing the talk, as well it should be, But all too often no time is spent on preparing to be an effective table leader, which in the over all picture is much more important. A candidate's weekend can be made or lost during the table discussions. It is during this time that the talks start to make sense. Emotions start to coming out. They confront their short comings failures and their successes. It is up to the table leaders to guide the candidates through this process, but before they can do this they must learn how. A good place to start is to study the "Table Leaders Responsibilities" and "Conference Room Techniques". Both of these can be found on the Cursillo web site under the School of Leaders. They cover in detail;

The Role of the team member

The Table Family

Group Discussions

Posters

Chapel Visits

Objectives of the table discussions

Characteristics of the group and how they develop

And also dealing with difficulties.

In order to be an effective table leader you must know more than these two documents. You must also know the key points to ALL of the talks not just the one you are giving. One way to do this is to read your Three Day Manual. I can't encourage you enough to read this book thoroughly before the weekend and reread it before each weekend you work. It will refresh you with the layout of the weekend and the role, purpose and timing of the weekend. The second is to review "The Outline of Talks", which can also be found on the Cursillo web site under the School of leaders. This outline gives in a very brief synopsis, the major points of each talk. One suggestion that came up at the last meeting was to print these out and keep them hidden in your folder, so you can reference them throughout the weekend. Remember, it is the table leaders responsibility to make sure the discussions stay on track. How can you do this if you don't know where the track is. We have never had any type of formal training for being a table leader and as a result problems have arisen. That needs to change. From now on, we are going to put an emphasis on properly training all of our table leaders.

Even though we all put our confidence in the Holy Spirit to guide us through the weekend, to write our talks, to deliver our talks, and to grace the candidates, we are still

required to do our part. Let's go through some of the major responsibilities you have when you are in the conference room either as a speaker or as a silent professor.

But first I'd like to say something about all team members. It is our responsibility is to be examples of Christ living within us. He must not only be reflected at your table and on the weekend; we should be living His Life always. St. Francis said; "Preach the Gospel always and if necessary use words." There is so much more to working the kitchen than making oatmeal, washing pots and pans and cleaning toilets. What is at the heart of the Cursillo movement? Prayer, prayer and palancha, are what keeps this movement thriving. The prayers we offer before and especially during a weekend are so powerful. Remember on Saturday night after the candle light song, the rectors says; "What you have just witnessed is living palancha." Well, ladies and gentlemen, your weekend of service to the candidates is real living palancha. So every time you wash a pan or pour someone a cup of coffee or clean out the shower, offer it to God for the candidates. I think this is what St. Theresa, the Little Flower, told us to do and she was declared a doctor of the Church.

The other important aspect of working a weekend is the living witness of our faith and being an example of a Christian Community to the candidates. This example can be a stronger form of evangelization than hearing a talk. How many witness talks have you heard at closure like this; "The talks were very powerful but what really touched me the most was this group of ladies or guys, who gave up their weekend to come here and serve us." Our example this weekend can be worth more to the candidates than a hundred talks.

## **The Conference Room**

I am so happy to see some new people in the conference room for this Cursillo. I know it will be a very special time for you and all of the speakers. Giving a talk is always my moment closest to our Lord. These talks were written by the Holy Spirit. They are His talks and you will be His instruments this weekend. If you ever wonder if God is working in the world today, all you have to do is be in the conference room on a Cursillo weekend. It just blows me away to see the power of God working through the speakers to touch the hearts of the candidates on each and every weekend. As Table Leaders, you will have a great responsibility this weekend. You must guide the candidates on their three day journey to find Christ in their lives. How? By doing what you should, by being Christ to the candidates and by not getting in the way of the Holy Spirit.

I strongly encourage anyone working this weekend especially those of you in the conference room to read pages 49 to 55 from the Leader's Manual. It really discusses in detail the technique for personal contact with the candidates on the weekend. I'd like to read the opening paragraphs.

“For this reason, side by side with the .....Leaders must be willing to open themselves up as a friend without trying to diplomatically test the spiritual condition of the Cursillista.”

In that short weekend we use the Cursillo method discussed in the Action Talk. We make a friend, be a friend and bring that friend to Christ.

There are two ways a rector can set up the conference room. He can either let the candidates know who the table leaders are up front or he can keep it a secret until the talk

is given. Either approach is fine, and it is solely up to the discretion of the rector. There are certain things the table leader should be aware of, depending on the approach used.

It is a little easier to guide the discussions and not be perceived as the “teacher” when the first approach is used. But you have to be careful not slip up like telling everyone when you made your Cursillo during the conference room introductions. If you do, be honest. If you are asked by someone, be honest. But don’t offer it up unless you have to. Let them figure it out as time progresses.

If the rector elects to be up front about it, you have to be careful how you guide the discussions especially at the start of the weekend. For the first few talks, the candidates are still trying to figure out how this all works. If they know you are a table leader, they will look to you for the answers instead of trying to figure it out for themselves. Point #7 of the Conference Room Techniques says; “Do not allow yourself or anyone else in the group to be an expert or teacher.” There is a huge difference between guiding a discussion and becoming the Shell Answer Man or woman at your table. The basic objective of the table discussions are;

- To get each individuals point of view (repeat)
- To produce a summary of the talks for the table’s presentation at the poster party.

One of the purposes of the discussion is to ensure that the main points of the talk have been grasped. An effective leader will understand these points and their progression, and be able to move things along when the discussion gets bogged down. It is during these discussions that message of the talks are understood. It is also the time when community is formed. This is why the talks need to stay on time! It is during the group discussion

where the rubber hits the road. So we can't afford to cut them short, but they are the first things to go when we start to run behind.

The following is a list of some key points you must remember in order to be an effective table leader.

1) Never tell a candidate they are wrong, even if they are wrong. Let me say that again.... There are much better ways to address this problem than confronting them like this. First offer a different perspective and offer it for discussion to the group. If that doesn't work then move on to something else. Talk to the Spiritual Director and rector about the problem. Have the Spiritual Director talk to the candidate one on one. Candidates will be much more open to correction from them than you.

2) Remember, you are not reliving your Cursillo. The weekend is about the candidates NOT you. You may have a very powerful experience and that is great. But all too often that experience and emotions come forth and the table leader ends up dominating the group discussion. DO NOT let this happen. You should be the strong silent type. If the discussions are going good then be quiet. Let them talk this is their week end not yours.

3)The poster party is always a highlight of the weekend. But putting them together is really the most important part. It's a chance for each team to put the talks together in a coherent way. At least that's they way most of them turn out. You need to make sure all of the team members participate in some manor. This is a good opportunity for the table leaders to recap the main points of the talks. But make sure you don't give a summary at the poster party and let the candidates explain their posters. This time is for

the candidates. You already had yours let them have theirs. This is a very important process for many of the candidates. Many have never shared their faith openly in front of a group before. This can be a very powerful moment for them. Let them experience it. Let the assistant rector know the talk you were secretary, and he will make sure that talk is not picked for your table summary.

4) Lead your table by example. One of the best ways to do this is to take notes, especially on Friday and on Sunday. The candidates don't know what to do on Friday and by Sunday, they're out of gas. Participate in the discussions with sincerity and openness and the candidates will follow your lead.

5) When introducing yourself on Thursday night, make yours short and sweet. Many times the leaders spend more time talking than the candidates. Again this is about them not you.

6) We always try to pair an experienced table leader with a newer table leader. That is done for a reason. The more experienced leader should be able to guide and direct the newer one. But that does not always happen. As a newer table leader, it is your responsibility to know how a table should function properly. If your experienced leader is making mistakes it is up to you to bring him aside and discuss the concern. Many times it is no big deal, the person may not even realize he is doing something wrong. If that doesn't work you must bring it to the rector or rectora. You can not let it go and say; "Well he or she must know better, after all they have been in the movement much longer than me." The success of a candidate's weekend could rest on this decision.

7) Finally, I want to touch on is the Chapel visits. This is also a very powerful part of the weekend. It gives the candidates a glimpse of the prayer that goes before the Lord during a Cursillo. Before you go in to pray over the speaker, let your team know what you are going to do and encourage each one to say a small prayer. You never know, this could be the first time this candidate has said a prayer out loud in many years. The table leaders should open and close the prayer time in the chapel.

The conference room is a wonderful place on a Cursillo weekend. It's where miracles happen. It's where the candidates will meet Jesus on a very deep and personal level. We have been called to serve the candidates this weekend. We have been called by God to be servant leaders, to guide them on this three day walk with Christ. What an awesome responsibility! It may be more responsibility than many realize. God has entrusted these candidates to us and we must not let them down.

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