



Unity in the Essence And Purpose of the School of Leaders and Secretariat

Presented by Alex Mejia, Region 10 Coordinator, at the 36th National Cursillo Encounter held at Wheaton College in the Diocese of Joliet, July 23-26, 2026.

My Name is Alex Mejia, and I am the Region 10 English Cursillo Coordinator. It is an honor and a true blessing to be with you today, as we reflect on this Rollo that lies at the very heart of the Cursillo Movement.

Introduction

In Cursillo, we must first recognize the importance of achieving a unity of purpose and understanding of the Foundational Charism of the Cursillo movement. However, to fully understand this unity of purpose, it is essential to study and explore the HOW and the WHY of the Foundational Charism. As Committed Leaders, dedicated to promoting and living the charism ourselves, we should understand that Cursillo is not something we do; it is something we live, because to live Cursillo is to live the gospel. The two operational structures of the movement are the School of Leaders and the Secretariat. They are independent but rely on each other, and neither can function properly without the other. At the beginning of Cursillo, Eduardo Bonnin, the founder of Cursillo, could already foresee the movement's growth and that it would eventually require basic service structures to preserve its essence. The structures that were put in place were the School of Leaders and the Secretariats. So, let's start by briefly reviewing the purpose of the Secretariat and School of Leaders. Later, we will review the criteria of the Foundational Charism to foster unity, purpose, and greater clarity within these structures.

The Secretariat

We all know that the Diocesan, Regional, and National Secretariats are responsible for promoting the movement's Foundational Charism. The Diocesan Secretariat is a group of leaders, selected from the School of Leaders, and appointed and commissioned by their Bishop. The Diocesan Secretariat serves as a support unit linking the Cursillo community to the local bishop. A Diocesan Secretariat is composed of clergy and laity, men and women who focus on providing service rather than exerting control. The Secretariat is the structure for the basic development, promotion, and proper implementation of the Cursillo movement in the Dioceses. Their responsibilities include embracing, studying, and promoting the charism. They ensure that all activities align with the original purpose of developing and coordinating a school of leaders that reflects the charism. They support the Ultreyas and set up workshops and retreats for the Cursillistas. The Secretariat reviews and implements the US National Cursillo Movement Operational Bylaws established by the National Secretariat. They ensure that an up-to-date National Cursillo Apostolic Plan is in place. Diocesan Secretariats participate in Regional and National Encounters. They oversee the implementation of the Cursillo method in all three phases: the Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo, which ensure unity in the message and the freedom of the Cursillistas. Eduardo Bonnin's vision likened the Cursillo Movement to an umbrella, with the Secretariat as the body of the umbrella and the School as the spokes that support it to maintain its integrity. Eduardo was clear in his definition of what the Secretariat and its members should be and what they should be concerned with. He said that Cursillo seeks to foster a deep hunger for God and the encounter of each person's freedom with the Spirit of God. The Secretariates exist to simplify, facilitate, and

make possible the living of everything that is fundamentally Christian, and to be the guardians of the purity of the method. As such, the members of the secretariat are servants of servants. Their role is to provide a simple service to the movement. Unfortunately, it often becomes a place of prestige, power, and control rather than focusing on humble service. The Secretariats are committed leaders who act together to guide the movement by example, serving as the leaven in the world. The Secretariat and the School of Leaders never come together to do something; they always come together first and foremost 'to be' something together.

- When hearing the Founders' vision, consider what he is expressing: his message is simply 'to be'. To be Christian because Christ and his Grace are the way to the Father.
- To be friends because friendship is the foundational charism in Cursillo.
- To be servants.
- To be authentic.
- To be apostles because we were commissioned to communicate the good news of God's love to others.
- So as Cursillo Leaders, we are called to keep the founders' vision burning brightly, illuminating the path to Christ.
- A typical Secretariat consists of these positions: the Diocesan Cursillo Coordinator, Spiritual Advisor, School of Leaders, Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo Coordinators, Treasurer, and Secretary.

The School of Leaders

Now let's discuss the School of Leaders. As Cursillo leaders, we need to understand that everything that we are and everything that we do in Cursillo comes from the School of Leaders. As I mentioned before, even the Secretariat comes from the School of Leaders. We are one body, one movement in Christ. First, let's talk about what the School of Leaders is not. There is often a tendency to make the school what it isn't.

The term "School of Leaders" can be confusing and misunderstood, so let's explore what it means and what it represents in the Cursillo mentality.

The word 'school' often brings to mind visions or memories of a classroom where students sit at their desks, listening to a teacher giving lectures or instructions. However, in the context of Cursillo, nothing could be further from the truth. It is not and never has been a School where someone like a seasoned Cursillistas starts to take over with their acquired knowledge. There is no hierarchy, certificates, or awards. No one graduates with a diploma. We are all equal; all Cursillistas are leaders. In the context of Cursillo, we are referring to a School of Reflection, where people come together to share their thoughts and discuss their ideas. They explore and deepen their understanding, gaining wisdom and insight. Together, the participants reach a unity of purpose and an understanding of what Cursillo is. That's what we try to achieve in school. How many times have you invited Cursillistas to the School of Leaders, and they respond with, "Ah, no, don't look at me, I'm not a leader"? Belonging to a School does not make one a leader; similarly, not all leaders are necessarily in the school. In fact, some of the leaders may never attend a School of Leaders. The reasons for not doing so are their own; we can't force them. If this is the case, we should never make a person feel guilty for not attending the School of Leaders, because we believe they should be attending. The most important thing is that everyone should feel free to contribute

wherever and whenever the Lord calls them, and only the person and God know what that is and when. Every movement needs a core group of leaders who exemplify everything the movement is supposed to be. This core group of leaders has chosen to serve within the movement; they are dedicated to deepening their understanding of the mentality, essence, purpose, and method to understand the why of things. They do not teach by preaching but rather by listening and being the living witnesses to the very essence of the charism; they are the leaven within the movement.

The School of Leaders is a gathering of friends and a reunion of leaders who have faith in Christ, individually and collectively. They have placed him at the center of their lives to let him lead their lives and to live Cursillo with consistency in their personal lives. It's at the School where they learn to deepen their understanding of the fundamentals of living as a Christian.

This group of friends illuminates, encourages, and relieves our restlessness with the best means possible: friendship. This friendship must translate into service towards others. In Cursillo, all of us are familiar with the phrase: *make a friend, be a friend, and bring your friend to Christ*, right? If the goal of making a friend is true friendship, then making a friend requires that we have matured ourselves into having the capacity to actually be a true Christian friend. It is within the friendship with Christ that we begin to form friendships with others. A Christian friend is a joy, and friendship magnifies our joy. When we use the phrases "make a friend," "be a friend," and "bring your friend to Christ," we can conclude that some kind of action is required of us. In Cursillo, this apostolic action translates into exercising the power of unconditional love towards the other. In other words, if there is no friendship, there is no Cursillo. These leaders want God's love to reach as many people as possible, so naturally they want to be part of Christianity in Action. Because we are friends, our service towards others flows from that friendship, so putting something in action, such as meetings, workshops, encounters, or Cursillo weekends, is no longer a service but an act of love. As they learn more about the Cursillo Method, we then start to collaborate with others in communicating the joyful news that God loves us. It's in the School where they are infused with the founder's vision as they come to understand their role as Leaders to build a solid foundation for the Cursillo Movement in every Diocese.

Now, let's review some of the specific features and criteria of the Foundational Charism. But before we do, there are a couple of questions for us to consider. Do you believe in the foundational Charism of Cursillo? Do you study it, reflect on it, internalize it, and allow it to become a way of life? If a person experiences a true conversion, they naturally evangelize. Eduardo Bonnín emphasized that you don't have to tell a Christian to evangelize, any more than you have to tell water to be wet.

The Secretariat and the School of Leaders are encouraged to study the four essential elements of the Charism of Cursillos in Christianity. We must be ready to inform our leadership about this Charism. According to the Study of the Charism book, the four essential elements include:

1. It's a gift from God,
2. The gift is given to a person or group,
3. The gift is for the good of the Church, and
4. The gift is recognized by the hierarchy.

This Charism defines, distinguishes, and sets it apart from other movements, associations, and communities within the Church. The charism shapes a mentality that inspired the birth of the

Cursillo Movement, which accompanies its natural and permanent growth, and which shapes its identity.

The charism originates and drives an ecclesial movement: from within the Church to act in the field of evangelization with its own specific mentality, purpose, and method.

The charism determines the purpose of Cursillo to enable the conversion of people and the transformation of environments. It seeks and promotes the experience of what is fundamentally Christian, starting from the encounter with oneself, Christ, and others, to act as a leaven in the environments.

The charism shapes the essential lines of the Cursillo method. It is a kerygmatic method, grounded in the joyful proclamation of Christian fundamentals by witnesses and through friendship, developed in the three stages: Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo.

Understanding the “Charismatic Dimension” of the Cursillo Movement

It's essential for the Secretariates and the School of Leaders to understand the Charismatic Dimension of the Cursillo Movement. Recognizing that in its foundations there is a special Gift of the Spirit, and not only a purely human initiative, therefore, participating in the Cursillo Movement, because it is inspired by the Spirit, means living inspired by the Spirit, welcoming, understanding, and living the charism. It is necessary to know and understand the charism, what it is, and what its specific features are. Above all, it's necessary to live it, embrace it, and own the charism, allowing it to shape our mentality and guide and drive our actions. The word charism is a gift or present. A charism is a grace that the Holy Spirit gives to those he wants, but not only for the person who receives it, but for the benefit of the entire community and the church. The charism is like a seed that develops everything that is essential to the movement. The 'Why' explains the Mentality, the 'What' defines its Essence, the 'What for' relates to the Purpose, and the 'How' describes the Method.

One Movement, One Founder

The Cursillo is a Movement with a Founder, Eduardo Bonnín. Bishop Joseph Cordes, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity at the time, interviewed Eduardo Bonnín in Mallorca, Spain, and determined that Eduardo Bonnín indeed founded Cursillos in Christianity. You can read the interview in Signs of Hope, available on the National Cursillo website. Eduardo Bonnín had a private audience with Pope Benedict XVI, who welcomed him as the founder of Cursillo. There's an article about how this interview came about in June of 2021 in the National Cursillo website newsletter by Juan Ruiz. In 1998, Saint Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) addressed the subject of movements, stating that all participants trace their spiritual lineage to the insights, visions, and spirituality of their founders.

Cursillo, An Ecclesial Movement of Lay Initiative

The Second Vatican Council, Christifideles Laici (Latin for Christ faithful laity), and Saint John Paul II were instrumental in awakening the Lay faithful of Christ. The apostolate of the Good News of the gospel is not only for the hierarchy but for everyone. Cardinal Rylko Stanislaw said that it's not easy being a lay person in today's world. To be a lay person requires courage; it is the time of the laity because the laity is irreplaceable in the task of evangelization. The new

evangelization will be carried out primarily by laypeople. The Secretariat and School of Leaders must foster a common understanding that Cursillos in Christianity is a movement driven by laity, supported by clergy. After Eduardo's thorough study of the environments in the 1940s, the essence, purpose, and basis of the method originated from this apostolate. After the hierarchy witnessed the fruits of Cursillo, Bishop Juan Hervás blessed Cursillo with both hands. Eduardo emphasized that Cursillo will always persevere when the laity and clergy fulfill their distinct yet complementary roles and will grow when there is an intimate union and communication between them. The Cursillo Movement is a movement from within the church, not only for the church but for the world.

The Essence and Divine Purpose of Cursillo

The Secretariat and the School of Leaders need to arrive at a unity of purpose and understanding of the Essence of the Cursillo Charism, which is JESUS CHRIST, THE PERSON AND FRIENDSHIP. The Secretariats and Schools need to study the founder's thinking, that is, to know his writings, to read his ideas published in his books, and to familiarize themselves with his mentality and vision. The founder often said he was an Apprentice Christian, who dedicated his life to proclaiming God's love and always valuing people through friendship. He devoted his entire life to Cursillo. Therefore, we can say the basis for his thinking was instrumental in developing the Cursillo mentality, the essence, purpose, and method. The three fundamental principles that guided the founder's life were: Christ, the person, and friendship. Everything begins with Christ.

Our movement exists because thousands of friendships have been formed throughout the years. Every Ultreya, every School of Leaders, every Cursillo Weekend, every Group Reunion begins and ends with friendship. Friendship is what opens hearts that otherwise might remain closed. It creates an environment where people feel accepted. When people realize they are loved, they become more receptive to hearing about God's love.

That is why we continue repeating one of the most familiar phrases in Cursillo: **Make a friend, be a friend, and bring your friend to Christ.** Those are not simply kind words; they are the method of evangelization that Eduardo Bonnin entrusted to us. Before we can bring anyone to Christ, we ourselves must first become authentic Christian friends. Friendship is not about convincing someone or winning an argument. It is about accompanying another person with patience, respect, and genuine love until they discover that Christ has been walking beside them all along.

When friendship becomes authentic, service is no longer an obligation. It becomes a natural expression of love. The work we do in the School of Leaders, the Secretariats, Ultreyas, workshops, and Cursillo Weekends is no longer simply another responsibility. It becomes an act of love flowing from hearts united in Christ. Cursillo relies on friendship as its foundation since it is essential to everything else in the movement.

The purpose has never been to create extraordinary Christians. The purpose has always been to help ordinary people live extraordinary Christian lives within their ordinary environments. One friendship at a time, one person at a time, the gospel begins transforming the person from the inside out.

In Closing

As we bring this Rollo to a close, we are reminded that the School of Leaders and the Secretariat are not simply organizations within Cursillo. They are service structures that exist to preserve and promote the Foundational Charism entrusted to us through our founder, Eduardo Bonnin. Their purpose is to protect the mentality, essence, purpose, and method so that future generations may experience the same authentic Cursillo that changed our lives.

Unity of purpose does not mean that everyone thinks exactly alike. It means that we all share the same vision, the same mission, and the same desire to proclaim the joyful news that God loves every person. When we remain faithful to the Foundational Charism, we remain faithful to Christ, to the person, and to friendship, the three realities that guided Eduardo Bonnin throughout his life.

As leaders, our responsibility is not simply to organize weekends or hold meetings. Our responsibility is to become living witnesses of what is fundamental to being Christian. People should see Christ in our words, our attitudes, our friendships, and in the way we serve and love one another. If we truly live the charism, then the gospel naturally becomes attractive to those around us.

So, I leave you with this question. Are we merely working in Cursillo, or are we truly living Cursillo? When we live the charism every day, Christ becomes alive, normal, and near, not only in our lives but also in the lives of those we encounter.

May we continue studying the Foundational Charism, embracing it, protecting it, and above all living it with humility, joy, and friendship. Because, as Eduardo Bonnin reminded us, to live Cursillo is to live the gospel!

God Bless & De Colores!