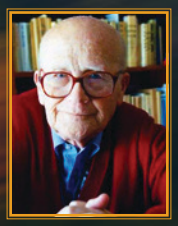
CURSILLOS in CHRISTIANITY
National Newsletter



Servant of God
Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló
Founder of
Cursillos in Christianity
1917 – 2008

October 2026

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Friendship Builds Community



Presented by Most Rev. Felipe Pulido, Auxiliary Bishop of San Diego,
36th National Cursillo Encounter, Wheaton, IL, July 24, 2026

I know many of you expected me to speak about unity, and unity remains a very important theme. But as we all know; the Holy Spirit often leads us in unexpected directions.

Even before I arrived to the National Encounter, one word kept returning to my heart, a word that lies at the very center of the Cursillo Movement:

Friendship.

That word would not leave me. It continued to echo in my mind and heart. So today, I would like to reflect with you on friendship. Is that okay?

I lived my Cursillo in 2003. I was ordained a priest in 2002, so just one year after my ordination I experienced my own Cursillo weekend. As you all know, we have a beautiful song that unites Cursillistas throughout the world: De Colores.

As a bishop in San Diego, I have had the privilege of celebrating with Cursillistas from many cultures and languages. I was deeply moved when I attended an English-speaking Cursillo and heard everyone singing De Colores. Later, when I joined a Vietnamese gathering, they too were singing De Colores. Different languages and different cultures. Yet the same spirit and the same song. I was truly touched.

As you know, De Colores includes animals making their sounds. So let me share a little story about some animals who were celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a rooster, a cow, a sheep, and, of course, a turkey.

All of them were filled with joy because Christ had risen.

The rooster was proclaiming: "Christ has risen!" The cow replied: "Where? Where?"

The sheep answered: "In Bethlehem!" And then, as only a turkey can do, the turkey kept saying in Spanish:

"Gordo, gordo, gordo!" Which means: "Fat, fat, fat!"

Do you have turkeys in Vietnam? In Korea? In the Philippines? We certainly have plenty of them in the United States. So there they were: The rooster proclaiming, "Christ has risen!" The cow asking, "Where?" The sheep answering, "In Bethlehem!" And the turkey simply repeating: "Gordo, gordo, gordo!"

Good day, my friends.

I am very happy and honored to be with you today.

Whenever I have the opportunity to be with the Cursillo Movement, I am filled with gratitude because I encounter something that is becoming increasingly rare in our world today: people who understand the beauty and the power of friendship.

I want to begin with a memory.

My grandmother was a very small woman. She was petite and slender. But physically small does not mean spiritually small. She possessed a strength that came from a deep faith.

She was born around 1910 in the mountains of central Mexico. She lived through difficult times; she knew poverty, hunger, and the struggle for life's necessities.

She lived through the Cristero War, a painful period of persecution and suffering for many Catholics in Mexico.

Life tested her faith, but it never destroyed it. She never allowed suffering to take away her joy. Instead, she became a woman who carried Christ's peace wherever she went.

She knew how to be present, how to listen, how to love, and how to be a friend.

My grandmother taught me many things. She taught me my prayers and how to pray the rosary, the catechism, and the stories of Sacred Scripture, and she answered my many questions about God.

But before she ever taught me about the faith, she taught me something even more important.

She taught me friendship.

She spent time with me, listened, and encouraged me. Moreover, she believed in me and made me feel loved.

Through her love, I began to understand God's love.

Looking back today, I realize that before my grandmother taught me about Jesus, she showed me Jesus, and before she spoke about God's love, she gave me a small experience of God's love.

And that, I believe, is often how evangelization happens. People do not first encounter Christ because someone wins an argument or gives them a perfect explanation.

Many times, people encounter Christ because someone loves them enough to walk with them.

My grandmother became my friend, and through her friendship she brought me to Christ.

This is why the motto of the Cursillo Movement has always touched my heart:

Make a friend.

Be a friend.

Bring a friend to Christ.

Those words are simple, but they contain a profound spirituality.

They describe the way Jesus himself evangelized. Jesus did not begin by building an institution. He began by forming relationships. He called people by name, walked with them, shared meals with them. He listened to their stories, entered their lives, and through friendship, transformed hearts.

That is why I believe friendship is one of the greatest needs of our time.

Our world has many things. We have incredible technology. And we have more information than any generation in history. In addition, we can communicate instantly with people anywhere in the world, and yet many people today are lonely.

We are more connected than ever, but many people feel more isolated than ever.

We bishops in the United States are very concerned about mental health in our country—the suffering of so many men and women, especially young men diagnosed with depression and anxiety.

Perhaps one of the greatest forms of poverty in our world today is not material poverty.

It is the poverty of friendship—the poverty of authentic relationships.

One of my responsibilities as an auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of San Diego is serving as a vicar for clergy.

During the week, I spend much of my time in my office. I read and respond to emails, meet with priests, review pastoral situations, prepare talks and homilies, and participate in many meetings, both in person and through Zoom.

It is important work that needs my attention. But I must confess to you: I always look forward to the weekends because the weekends allow me to leave the office and enter what Pope Francis often called the field hospital of the Church.

On weekends, I have the privilege of being with God's people.

I celebrate the Holy Eucharist and visit parishes. Very often after Mass, I listen to people carrying heavy burdens.

And you know what? People have difficult lives. I encounter people who are suffering. I meet people searching for hope. And again and again, I discover something: People don't just need answers.

They need someone who will walk with them. They need a friend or someone who will listen. They need someone who will say, "You are not alone." And that is friendship.

This is why I am grateful to be with you today. The Cursillo Movement has understood for decades what many people are rediscovering today:

The Christian faith is not communicated through information alone. It is communicated through relationships. In Cursillo, the Gospel is not only preached; it is shared through friendship. When I think about my grandmother and the gift of friendship, I think of the beautiful words found in the Book of Sirach:

"A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter. Whoever finds one finds a treasure. A faithful friend is beyond price. A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy."

I love this passage because Scripture gives friendship a dignity that our modern culture sometimes forgets.

Perhaps one of the greatest wounds of our society today is not only poverty or material need, but poverty of relationships.

Very often in our society, many people are surrounded by others but still feel alone.

Many people have thousands of contacts in their phones but very few people they can truly trust.

Many people can communicate instantly with the world, but they long for one person who will sit with them, have coffee, share a meal, listen, and walk with them.

That is the gift of friendship.

A true friend becomes a place of shelter, a source of healing, a reminder that we are not alone.

When I hear those words from Sirach, I think of my grandmother. She was my shelter, my treasure, and my remedy in my life. But Scripture takes us even deeper. Jesus revealed God through friendship.

In the Gospel of John, during the Last Supper, Jesus says to his disciples: "I no longer call you servants. I have called you friends." Imagine those words. The Creator of the universe, the Son of God, the Savior of humanity, looks at ordinary men and women and says: "I call you friends." Why?

God does not want a distant relationship with us, and He does not want us to know Him only as a set of rules or ideas; He desires communion. He longs for intimacy and friendship with us.

Look at the way Jesus lived his ministry. In the Gospels, we find him walking with his disciples, sharing meals, entering their homes, and celebrating their joys and sorrows.

With his friends Martha and Mary, he cried at the death of Lazarus.

He washed his disciples' feet, and finally, he gave his life for them.

Jesus shows us that the deepest expression of friendship is love that gives itself away.

That is why Jesus says: "No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

The Cross is the greatest act of friendship the world has ever known.

Even before Christianity, human beings recognized the importance of friendship.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote about friendship as a relationship in which two people seek the good of one another. Seeking the other's good is already a beautiful insight. A true friend is not someone who asks:

"What can I receive from this relationship?"

Because, let's be honest, sometimes when we have a friend, we are looking for that: What can I receive? A true friend asks:

"How can I help this person become the best version of themselves?"

Christianity takes this even farther.

A Christian friend does not simply want another person to be successful; he desires another person's holiness.

A Christian friend wants another person to discover God's love.

A Christian friend helps another person become the person God created them to be.

My dear friends, never underestimate the power of one true friend. One friend can change the direction of someone's life.

One friend can give someone the courage to continue. And a friend can help someone discover gifts they never recognized in themselves and can prevent another person from giving up.

I have a story.

When I was a pastor in Yakima, Washington, I met a beautiful family: a mom, a dad, and their 4 children.

I knew the children when they were little, and then they grew up.

The young woman, Anna, was about twenty-four, and she had a boyfriend. I say this with a smile because I want to make sure you are still awake!

I was trying to see if you were sleeping!

We became friends. I knew the family, and they often invited me for meals.

Later, the father told me what happened one day.

Anna brought her boyfriend to the house, and the boyfriend was different. The father did not like him at all. They started talking, and, of course, their egos got involved. At the end of the conversation, the father told Anna: "I am not going to give you permission to date him. You choose him or us."

Anna did not know what to do. She looked at him, looked at her father, went to her room, and got her clothes.

The father said, "You're going to leave without clothes?" Well—not without clothes! You know what I mean!

Without her things. She said okay, and she left.

Imagine the anger the father felt. He was furious and upset. Anger filled his heart. He called one of his friends and said: In his anger, he called one of his friends and said, "I need your help right now."

The friend was a Cursillista, and the father was also a Cursillista.

The friend said, "Okay, come to my house. When he arrived, the friend told him:

"Let's go to church. Let's go pray."

They went to pray together before the Blessed Sacrament, and after their prayer, his friend asked: "How do you feel?" He answered:

"I feel more at peace. Thank you."

Then he went home.

He did not do anything. Do you see how friendship can do so much good for another person?

This is why I believe the Cursillo Movement has a profound message for our time, because Cursillo has always understood that evangelization begins with friendship. The method is not first a program, a strategy, or an activity.

The method is a person. A person encountering another person, and listening to another person.

A person walking with another person and introducing that person to Jesus Christ.

That is the genius of Cursillo. Perhaps that is why Jesus chose twelve apostles; He formed a community.

He shared his life with them, transformed them, and through that small community of friends, the Gospel spread throughout the world.

The early Christians did not change the Roman Empire because they had better technology; they changed the world because people saw something different in them.

They saw a community that loved.

They saw people who cared for one another, welcomed strangers, forgave enemies, and lived differently.

"See how they love one another."

Their friendship became their witness.

Can they say that about us? Can they say that?

My dear friends, I believe we are living in another important moment in history.

Our world is changing rapidly. As we all know, technology is advancing every day.

Artificial intelligence is becoming part of our daily lives.

Even people like Elon Musk have said that AI will exceed human intelligence within a few years—that there may be very little AI cannot eventually do better than human beings.

But we all know that AI cannot love as human beings do.

Therefore, let us ask ourselves one question:

What is happening to our friendships?

Before we worry about artificial intelligence replacing human interaction, we should recognize that many people are already struggling to interact deeply with one another.

Before we talk about artificial intelligence, I believe we need to recognize what has already been happening around us.

The challenge of our time is not only that machines are becoming more intelligent; I believe that the challenge is that human beings are sometimes becoming less connected.

We have developed incredible ways to communicate, but we are slowly losing the art of conversation. People do not speak with each other.

We have more ways to reach people than any generation before us, and yet many people feel more alone than ever.

Allow me to invite you to imagine something.

This comes from something I read in Jonathan Haidt's The Anxious Generation.

Imagine that you fell into a deep sleep in June 2007, the day before the first iPhone was introduced, and that you woke up nineteen years later and stepped outside.

At first, everything seems normal, and the streets are familiar.

Cars are still driving, and people are still walking, families are still gathering.

But then you begin to notice something strange. You notice that people are behaving differently.

You enter a train station, and everyone is looking down at a small rectangular glass device.

You walk into an elevator, and it's silent; everyone stares at a screen.

You stand in line at a store, and no one is speaking because everyone is somewhere else.

You go to a restaurant and see a family sitting together at a table, but they aren't talking to each other; each person is absorbed in their own digital world.

You walk through a park and see parents with their children, but many eyes aren't on their children because they're on their phones.

Even small children are becoming fascinated by these glowing rectangles. "What's going on?"

"What happened to us?" I want to be clear: the problem is not the phone. I am using a phone right now.

I do not think the problem is technology. As you can see, I am using technology right now.

Technology is a gift. In fact, some of you can hear me in Spanish because of technology. Some of you can hear me in Vietnamese.

Technology has helped humanity in extraordinary ways for many years.

It has allowed families separated by oceans to see one another.

It has helped doctors save lives and students learn. And it has allowed the Gospel to reach places that were once impossible to reach.

The Church is not afraid of technology. In fact, the Church has always welcomed authentic human progress.

The question is not simply:

"Is technology good or bad?" The deeper question is:

"Does this technology help us become more human?"

As a bishop, I travel frequently.

One place where I observe society is in airports.

Airports are fascinating places because they bring together thousands of people from every walk of life and from around the world.

Sometimes I wonder: How many beautiful encounters have I missed?

How many stories have I never heard?

How many friendships never began because I was so distracted by my phone, answering emails, that I failed to notice the person sitting next to me?

Recently, I experienced something personally that made me reflect more deeply.

I was visiting my family in Washington State and my three sisters, and some of my nieces and nephews. We were all together in the living room.

It was a beautiful moment; we had made an effort to be together, and I invited them to come and share a meal.

But at one point, I looked around the room, and everyone—even my mom—had a phone in their hand—everyone, including me.

No one was really talking, asking questions, or sharing stories.

We were physically together but emotionally somewhere else.

I remember thinking: "What is going on?" "What is happening to us?" I even got my phone and threw it away.

My nieces and nephews looked at me: "What's going on, Uncle? Are you okay?"

Here we were: people who love one another, gathered in the same room. And yet our attention was captured by people who were not even present.

That moment stayed with me because it reminded me of something important. I believe that the greatest danger of technology is not that it will make us less productive.

The greatest danger is that it can slowly make us less present.

And this does not only happen to young people.

It happens to all of us. We are human beings, and we need presence.

A child needs a parent who looks into their eyes, and a spouse needs a spouse who listens.

A person who is suffering needs someone who will sit beside them, and a grieving person does not need an algorithm.

They need a friend. Someone who will say: "I'm here. You don't have to carry your cross alone."

This is why the crisis of our time is not simply technological.

It is relational.

Many people today are experiencing what some writers describe as a crisis of loneliness.

Jonathan Haidt's book The Anxious Generation reflects on how smartphones and social media have changed the way many people—

especially young people—experience relationships, community, and daily life.

His concern is not simply about devices.

His main concern is what happens when digital experiences begin to replace real human experiences and when virtual connections replace personal encounters.

When scrolling replaces conversations and when online approval replaces authentic belonging.

My brothers and sisters, we were not created to exchange information; we were created for communion.

From the beginning of creation, God said: "It is not good for man to be alone."

That statement remains true today.

Human beings need relationships. We need community, friendships, and love.

Because deep within every human heart there is a desire to be known and loved.

And that desire comes from God.

This is why artificial intelligence raises such important questions.

Artificial intelligence can do many remarkable things.

It can process information, analyze data, produce answers, and imitate conversations.

But the human person is more than information.

The human person is more than efficiency and more than productivity.

The human person has a soul.

The human person is created in the image and likeness of God.

As artificial intelligence continues to develop, how do we ensure technology serves humanity rather than diminishes it.

How do we make sure that, as we become more technologically advanced, we do not become less human?

This is where the Church has an important voice.

When a pope chooses a name, he often points to a spiritual and pastoral vision.

By choosing the name Leo, Pope Leo XIV connects himself with Pope Leo XIII.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII faced a world experiencing another revolution.

It was not a digital revolution; it was the Industrial Revolution.

Factories were transforming society, and machines were changing the way people worked.

New economic systems were developing, and many workers suffered because human dignity was often forgotten. People were treated as instruments of production rather than as sons and daughters of God.

Workers faced long hours, unsafe conditions, and poverty, and the world was changing rapidly, and the Church needed to say something. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII wrote one of the most important documents in Catholic social teaching, Rerum Novarum. He reminded society of a fundamental truth: The human person must always remain at the center. The economy exists for the human person, and work exists for the human person. Technology exists for the human person. Pope Leo XIII defended the dignity of workers, the importance of just wages, workers' rights, and the responsibilities of employers.

His message was clear: No economic or technological progress is truly progress if it diminishes human dignity.

Today we find ourselves facing another great transformation with the arrival of Artificial Intelligence.

Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical,Magnifica Humanitas ("On Safeguarding the Human Person), was published on May 25, 2026. Its central message is that artificial intelligence must serve the human person, not replace, diminish, or dominate humanity. Drawing on Catholic social teaching, the Pope emphasizes human dignity, truth, freedom, the dignity of work, the common good, and solidarity. He warns that technological progress becomes dangerous when power and decision-making are concentrated in ways that reduce human agency. Ultimately, he calls Christians and society to ensure that AI helps build a civilization of love, where technology remains at the service of authentic human relationships and the dignity of every person.

Artificial intelligence It can improve medicine, assist education, and help organizations serve people more effectively.

It can help us solve problems that once seemed impossible. But even great advancements require wisdom because every technology carries a moral question: Does this help the human person flourish?

The Church is not afraid of artificial intelligence, and the Church does not believe technology is the enemy.

Technology can be a beautiful expression of human creativity.

After all, our ability to create and innovate reflects something of the Creator himself.

But technology must always remain a servant, not a master. Artificial intelligence should help humanity, not replace it. It should support human relationships, not eliminate them. It should strengthen human dignity, not weaken it.

Recently, in the Diocese of San Diego, Bishop Michael asked leaders from several diocesan offices an important question: "How are we currently using artificial intelligence in our ministry and in the pastoral center?"

The answers were very interesting. Some people expressed hesitation, while others were still learning. Others were already using AI tools in practical ways, such as summarizing documents and reports. Some were using it to organize information, to improve writing and communication. I was one of them! In my emails, I write what I want to say and then ask AI to improve my writing. And guess what? It does it!

But then I review it again and again to make sure it says what I actually meant. It is an important tool.

I learned English as a second language, and it does not always come naturally to me. So this technology can be very useful. Some people are using AI to assist with research, presentations, catechetical materials, and planning.

The reality is that artificial intelligence is already becoming part of our lives and part of our ministry. That is not necessarily something to fear. The question is whether we use it wisely.

One of the pioneers of artificial intelligence, Kai-Fu Lee, has made an important observation.

He said that artificial intelligence has extraordinary abilities.

It can process enormous amounts of information, recognize patterns, and make decisions quickly in certain situations.

It can perform tasks with incredible efficiency. But artificial intelligence is not human intelligence. AI does not possess consciousness or self-awareness. It has no conscience or moral responsibility. It has no compassion or love. That distinction is extremely important. Artificial intelligence may one day write a beautiful reflection.

But it has never prayed. It can produce words about suffering, but it has never suffered.

It can describe compassion, but it has never loved. It can imitate conversations, but it cannot truly know another person's heart. Friendship requires something no machine can produce.

It requires presence, sacrifice, compassion. My friends, the question is not: "How do we compete with artificial intelligence?"

The question is: "How do we become more human?" "How do we become more fully human?"

The more technology advances, the more important human friendship becomes.

The more artificial intelligence grows, the more important authentic intelligence becomes.

And authentic human intelligence is not only the ability to think, but the ability to love.

This is where I believe the Cursillo Movement has something prophetic to offer the world today.

Cursillo has always understood what technology cannot create:

a relationship, a friendship, an encounter with Christ.

The future of evangelization will not depend only on better tools; I believe it will depend on better relationships.

That is why the simple Cursillo model is more relevant today than ever:

Make a friend.

Be a friend.

Bring a friend to Christ.

After everything we have reflected on today, I believe we arrive at a very important question:

What is the Christian response to a world being transformed by technology and artificial intelligence?

Should we reject technology or should we throw away our phones?

Should we fear every new development? I do not believe that is the answer. The answer is not less technology.

The answer is more humanity. The answer is to rediscover what makes us truly human.

And what makes us truly human is our capacity for friendship.

This is where the Cursillo Movement has a unique mission in the Church today, because Cursillo has always understood that evangelization begins with a relationship.

Before someone accepts a message, they often need to experience love.

Before someone listens to our words about Christ, they need to see Christ reflected in our lives.

Before someone enters a church building, they often need someone to walk with them first. That is friendship.

The Cursillo method is beautiful.

Make a friend.

Be a friend.

Bring a friend to Christ.

My friends, the future of evangelization will not depend only on how advanced our technology becomes.

It will depend on how deeply we love. It will depend on whether we are willing to accompany people and listen.

Let me return to where I began. I began with my grandmother praying the Rosary.

A simple woman. A woman without technology. A woman without influence or power, but she changed lives.

I truly believe that because of my grandmother, my family is baptized and Catholic.

And believe me, we are many! And it was this petite, slender woman. Why? Because she knew how to love, pray, and be a friend.

She never imagined that her quiet life would help shape the future of a young boy. That one day he will become a Bishop. She never imagined that her simple acts of love would become a lesson about evangelization.

But that is how God works.

God often changes the world through ordinary people who love in extraordinary ways.

When I think about the future of our humanity, I do not place my greatest hope in artificial intelligence.

I place my hope in people like my grandmother.

I place my hope in parents who teach their children to pray, in grandparents who pass on the faith.

I place my hope in priests who accompany the people and in deacons who live their lives in service to the Church.

I place my hope in Cursillistas—in all of you who make friends, become friends, and bring friends to Christ.

My friends, history has never been changed primarily by machines. People have changed history.

By saints, missionaries, mothers and fathers, grandparents and faithful friends.

By ordinary men and women who allow Christ to work through their lives.

That is how the Gospel spread in the first century.

And I believe that is how the Gospel will spread in the twenty-first century:

So today, as we face the challenges of artificial intelligence in a rapidly changing world, let us remember our mission. It is not complicated or impossible. But it is profoundly powerful:

MAKE A FRIEND.

BE A FRIEND.

BRING A FRIEND TO CHRIST.

Thank you for listening.