

THE HISTORY OF CURSILLO

Cursillo is a fairly recent movement within the Christian Church. Its roots go back to the years following the Civil War in Spain.

To help restore the spiritual life of their war-torn country, and to help address the spiritual lukewarmness of the Church, young men throughout Spain began to plan a great national pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela - a place which has been a focal point for Christian Pilgrimage since the middle ages.

This pilgrimage would give young people the opportunity to re-dedicate themselves to the whole mission of the Church, that is to say, to the work of bringing people to Christ.

Preparations were underway, with training schools for leaders being held, when the Second World War intervened. The Pilgrimage was delayed until 1948, when some 70,000 young people travelled to the Shrine of St. James at Compostela under the leadership of the Pilgrim Scouts of Spain, and prayers were offered for the re-conversion of the country.

During the war years, however, the foundations of Cursillo were being laid in Majorca, although those involved would never have foreseen at the time what the ultimate outcome of their meetings would be.

A group of young men on the island decided they should continue to prepare for the national pilgrimage and be ready to participate when it eventually took place. They met to pray together, and to share their thoughts about how they could become more effective in revealing the Light of Christ to the young people around them, especially the young men whose lives did not seem open to the Gospel. How could they themselves, they wondered, open the doors for others to know Christ better? They discovered, as they studied and planned and shared their ideas, a profound sense of being united with each other in Christ - of being a team of disciples.

In August 1944, a Spanish layman (Eduardo Bonnin) led a pilgrimage workshop at which the fundamentals of the Christian Faith were studied. This event was, in fact, the seed from which the Cursillo Movement sprang. Something new had been firmly planted and was to take root in the life of the Church, but it did not germinate until the year following the great national pilgrimage of 1948.

In early January 1949, the Bishop of Majorca (Juan Hervas) held a three-day course at the Monastery of San Honorato. Its chief purpose was to try to share with others the experience of those who had made the pilgrimage the previous year. This effectively established the shape of the three-day Cursillo, and it was immediately recognised that here the Church had a means by which to offer people a continuing pilgrimage for life.

In a very short time, these courses were being held regularly, and they were given the title by Bishop Hervas of "*Cursillo de Cristiandad*", which means "a short course in Christian living". It has simply been abbreviated to "*Cursillo*", or "short course" (properly pronounced KUR-SEE-YO). During the following years, the Cursillo method was shaped and refined, and the Movement's ideals were expanded to include older age groups as well.

The spirit of pilgrimage has remained at the heart of the Cursillo Movement and has put a distinctive mark on much of its spirituality and particular emphases. It is a spirit often apparent by its restlessness - that is to say, the longing to move further on one's Christian journey; also by a sense of dissatisfaction - that is to say, the awareness that the Church itself needs revitalising.

There is, as one would expect, a strong spirit of comradeship and 'belonging' among fellow pilgrims who share the vision of a life given more fully to the love of God and humanity.

In 1955, the Bishop of Majorca took another appointment, and his successor did not support the Movement. But over the following years, many of those who had appreciated the value of Cursillo dispersed into mainland Spain, taking it with them. From Spain it spread rapidly to other parts of Europe and South America, within the Spanish-speaking parts of the Roman Catholic Church. It reached the U.S.A. in 1957 through two Spanish airmen and a priest.

It was in the U.S.A. that the Anglican Church had its first encounter with Cursillo. Initially many Anglicans made their Cursillos as guests of the Roman Catholic Church. This led to a joint Cursillo in 1968 in San Francisco of Anglicans and Roman Catholics. From that point, Cursillo became an established method of renewal and mission in the Episcopal (Anglican) Church of the U.S.A. It also began to spread into other parts of the world-wide Christian family, beginning with the Lutheran and Methodist Churches.

In 1972 the Movement was officially recognised by the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas in Texas, with modifications being made to give it an Anglican flavour - to make it sit comfortably within our Anglican tradition and ethos, yet without losing what was fundamental to the original concept.

In September 1981, a team from Dallas, at their own expense, took Cursillo to the Dioceses of Gloucester in England and of Bangor in Wales. From there it has spread widely throughout the Anglican Church in the U.K., reaching Scotland (the Diocese of Edinburgh) in 1988.

The first Anglican Cursillos in this part of the world were held in Australia in September and October 1979 in the Diocese of Goulburn, brought to that Diocese from Canada. The move across the Tasman came in June 1988, following the invitation (made in May of the previous year) by Archbishop Brian Davis to the Diocese of Brisbane. Two teams - forty people in all - came from Brisbane (in typical Cursillo fashion at their own expense) for a period of almost four weeks to conduct four Cursillos.

Cursillo arrived in the Diocese of Christchurch in April 1996 with teams from the Diocese of Wellington, who came at the invitation of Bishop David Coles - again revealing their own personal commitment to this Movement.

In 1997, Wellington Diocese gifted Cursillo to Taranaki Diocese (which amalgamated with Waikato Diocese in 2008).

Christchurch Diocese gifted Cursillo to the Diocese of Dunedin in August 2000, and in 2011 teams comprising Cursillistas from both Wellington and Waikato-Taranaki gifted Cursillo to Waiapu Diocese.

It should be emphasised that the Bishop of a Diocese must give their approval of Cursillo, and extend the invitation, otherwise it cannot be introduced. This is to underline the fact that it is a Movement of the whole Church, of the whole people of God, even though it is essentially lay-driven.

Some terms in Spanish have been deliberately retained as part of Cursillo's special identity, and as a mark of honour and gratitude for its origins.

Cursillo is not some kind of elitist group or club within the Church and has no intention of establishing another organisation within individual parishes or ministry units.

Cursillo is a movement for the renewal of the Church. Its purpose is to encourage people to commit themselves more fully to living out the Christian ideal of following Christ, revealing him through their lives, and growing in grace. And it has a distinctive method, which is revealed in the Three Day Cursillo.