



# REGISTER

Volume 82 No. 22

\$1.95 USA / \$2.95 Canada

May 28 - June 3, 2006



**'Fruitful exchange between parishes and movements is necessary: The movement needs the connection with the parish so as not to become sectarian; the parish needs movements in order not to ossify.'**

— Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 1997 in *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Century*

The Register is looking at various new ecclesial movements and how they operate in parishes.

**Movement:** Cursillo is an ecclesial movement of the Church based on a "little course" in Christianity.

**Founding:** A group of laymen founded Cursillo in Spain during the 1940s while they were refining a technique to train pilgrimage leaders.

**Character:** The Cursillo method focuses on training lay people to become effective leaders in their parishes. A three-day weekend includes 15 talks, one emphasis of which is on preparing participants to take what they've learned with them for the rest of their lives — what they call the "fourth day."

**How it fits in:** Evangelist and author Ralph Martin said that "Cursillo has helped millions of Catholics around the world come into a living relationship with Christ and becoming active in his service."

**On the Web:** [www.natl-cursillo.org](http://www.natl-cursillo.org).

## 'Little Course,' Big Impact: The Cursillo Movement

Parishes and Movements Series, Part 6

by **PATRICK NOVECOSKY**  
*Register Correspondent*

ANDOVER, Mass. — Father Bill Cleary didn't need to go through the seminary again. It was 1963 and the newly ordained priest had nearly 10 years of education under his belt. So, he almost dismissed the idea when some of his parishioners encouraged the Augustinian priest to make a Cursillo — a three-day short course in Christianity.

But when they persisted, he thought he'd "do them a favor" and

take in the retreat-style weekend of talks and prayer. His attitude changed over the course of the three days.

"There was kind of a transformation that happened to me that was subtle, but it was real," he explained. "This short course in Christianity was a compacting of all of my years of philosophy and theology. It was done in such an understandable way — without the history of the practices and dogmas — but their practical use and support and the way in which they are there for our enrichment and not just for our knowledge."

Now the pastor of St. Augustine

Parish in Andover, Mass., Father Cleary encourages all of his parishioners to make a Cursillo — not just because of his experience, but because he's seen the fruit borne by the movement.

*Cursillistas* (people who've made a Cursillo weekend) are what Father Cleary likes to call "premier laypeople," those who are first responders to parish needs.

"For instance," he said, "we needed parishioners to sign cards in support of traditional marriage. The immediate response came from people in Cursillo. There was a nanosecond between the need and the response. So, you don't have to

appeal. You don't have to ply them or encourage them. All you have to do is announce this is the thing to be done. As a pastor, I'm looking out for that."

Cursillo is an ecclesial movement of the Church. A group of laymen founded it in Spain during the 1940s while they were refining a technique to train pilgrimage leaders. The Spanish word *cursillo* means "little course." The course developed to the point that Cursillo became an active renewal movement in the Church.

By 1957, the movement had spread to North America, when the *continues on page 7*

# Cursillo

*continuing page one story*

first American Cursillo was held in Waco, Texas. It has since become a nearly universal (and officially approved) movement of the Church. It has spread to other Christian faiths. Anglicans/Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians and Methodists have adapted some variation of Cursillo to their own communities.

Pope Benedict XVI will continue to guide "with paternal affection" the ecclesial movements, associations and communities, which were nurtured by Pope John Paul II, said Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican's secretary of state. Pope Benedict has called members of new movements to meet together in Rome on Pentecost, as his predecessor did in 1998.

## 'Onward'

The Cursillo method focuses on training lay people to become effective leaders in their parishes. The three-day weekend includes 15 talks, some given by priests and some by lay members. One emphasis of the weekend is on preparing participants to take what they've learned with them for the rest of their lives — what they call the "fourth day."

Christine Burke, who attends Father Cleary's parish in Andover, has been living her fourth day since she made her Cursillo in 1980.

"I grew up in a Catholic environment," she explained, "but there was still something more that I was looking for. I was 22 and wanted more than I was getting.

"The Cursillo helped develop my spiritual life. It gave my spiritual life an agenda, a sense of what the priorities are, in a sense."

Today, as St. Augustine's Cursillo coordinator with her husband, Tom, Christine Burke is eager to have others draw closer to the Lord through Cursillo. But, she stressed, making a Cursillo is not about the weekend. It's about serving others.

"Cursillo continues because its foundation is piety, study and action," she said. "It's about how you get to know Christ more and how you're being Christ to others."

Cursillistas are encouraged to meet regularly in a small group called *Ultreya* (onward), a word that pilgrims

use when greeting each on the "trail of St. James" toward the shrine of Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

"The reason Cursillo is more than a good weekend is because you meet with a group of people, and you share your [faith journey]," she explained. "It's not a social hour. It's a half hour or 45 minutes of, 'Where is my relationship with Christ? How did I see Christ working in my life?' That's the whole basis of what Cursillo is."

Evangelist and author Ralph Martin was a senior at Notre Dame, caught up in the confusion of the 1960s, when he made his Cursillo.

"I was skeptical that it was really going to impact me or be impressive in any kind of way," he explains. "But to make a long story short, I was blown away by the clear presentation of truths, the clear personal witness to the reality of Christ by so many lay people and priests.

"I had a real encounter with the living Christ and came to a deepened faith and repentance and desire to give my whole life to the Lord and be his servant," he said.

Martin, who founded Renewal Ministries in 1980, is the director of Graduate Programs in The New Evangelization at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit.

"Cursillo was really the main adult formative experience in my life," he said. "Lessons from the Cursillo and the Cursillo movement have stayed with me.

Father Cleary says his parish has a very active women's group and has just formed a men's group. But Father Cleary asked that all men's group members make a Cursillo.

"That's the deal that I made because it gives them their seminary; it gives them a common experience; and it gives them a totally traditional and conservative view — and a very balanced view of practice of the faith and service to others," he said. "I see it as a kind of lay seminary system."

Burke, who also serves as an extraordinary minister of Communion and lector, agreed.

"For me, it's brought me back to the basics," she said. "If you go on a Cursillo, you're going to get fed and you're going to come back renewed."

*Patrick Novacosky is based in Naples, Florida.*