

MOVING CURSILLO FORWARD
The State of the movement for 2022

Tuesday
November 9, 2021 @ 1900
Erie Cursillo Office

Good evening from the Cursillo office. I am Deacon Tom McAraw, Deacon Assistant All Saints, Catholic Chaplain SCI Albion for men, SCI Cambridge Springs for women, and Spiritual Director of Erie Cursillo.

I usually introduce the love of my life and best friend Pam at this time but she is at home like all of you waiting to see and hear what I am about to share.

WELCOME

PLEASE JOIN ME IN A PRAYER TO BEGIN OUR TIME TOGETHER. The prayer is from our Cursillo Morning prayers and is called A Prayer for Today.

I selected this prayer because tonight is a new day for our beloved Cursillo Movement. As I read the prayer, please try to focus your thoughts on our mission, goal, participation, and benefits of our Cursillo experience.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

“This is the beginning of a new day. God has given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for good.

What I do today is very important because I am exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever, leaving something in its place I have traded for it. I want it to be a gain, not a loss – good not evil. Success, not failure, in order that I shall not regret the price I paid for it.”



OBJECTIVE

My objective for this evening is to let everyone know that we have emerged from our extended time of prayer and contemplation in the desert.

At the August Ultreya we held at All Saints in Waterford, I shared the following comments.

Can we see God's presence in our time of challenge, crisis, and suffering?

Richard Rohr once said, "the only way the Lord can call us to a greater wisdom is by making the system fall apart. That's called suffering. It's how God shows us that life is bigger than we presently imagine it. Faith allows us to live in a shaky position so that we have to rely upon another."

We need to take time to go into the desert to reflect on God's word, to go beyond the desire to "handle things on our own."

Whenever the number forty is found in Scripture, it relates to a time of trial or testing in order to inaugurate an event of great significance.

Through hardships lasting 40 days or years, we endure to become more spiritually aware of our need for God.

For all intents and purposes, it was a time of no public ministry but an essential time for us all to reflect and pray about our mission, goals, expectations, and the rebirth of the movement.

We had no gatherings, Ultreyas, zoom meetings, newsletters, emails, or messages from the office posted on Facebook.

During our time in the desert, our Covid task Force finalized plans for Cursillo weekends. Plans include revised daily schedules, activities, procedures, and expected participation numbers of candidates and team members.

- *I continued to search for an administrative Assistant and Assistant Spiritual Director.*
- *Potential teams have been discussed and contacts will be made in the near future.*
- *New manuals are being prepared based on revisions to schedules and roles.*
- *A list of Secretariat members wishing to leave the board was created and replacements considered.*
- *A Sunday Coordinator was selected as the executive officers change roles.*
- *The status, form, schedule, and locations of Ultreyas is still being discussed.*

The desert time revealed much to me about the movement and people involved.

Tonight, I share the results of our journey.

PRESENTATION AND RECOGNITION OF OUT GOING PRESIDENT RICK SKLADANOWSKI

Rick has the honor and distinction of being one of the few presidents who have served multiple or successive terms as the leader of the executive team.

He also will go down in history as the only president never having had a chance to participate in that role at a Cursillo weekend. COVID created the most unique presidential situation we have witnessed to date.

His work, sacrifice, cooperation, and leadership will never be overlooked, however, even though the most exciting experience never presented the grace and reward for all he gave.

Rick is now stepping into the world of the “has been” and that group of us who have been there will always honor and respect you for your time in leadership and your ability to be flexible, spiritual, and genuine in all you have done for the movement.

At this time I would like to present you with this token of appreciation that you can display and view with a smile as you look back on your presidential Journey.

Be Blessed and remember that the true gift is always in your giving. Congratulations Rick



**RICK AND MARY SKLADANOWSKI
PRESIDENTIAL COUPLE OF CURSILLO 2020 / 2021**



VICKY AGCAOILI #258
Administrative Assistant
Office Manager



RICK SKLADANOWSKI #174
Immediate Past President



NICK HEISE #227
President



JEFF HICKIN #180
Vice President



STEVE PATTERSON #192
Sunday Closing Coordinator

CURSILLO OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Vicky: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday from 9:30 AM to 2:30 PM

Deacon Tom: Tuesday, Thursday, every other Wednesday 9:30 AM to 2:30 PM

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TENTATIVE CURSILLO SCHEDULE FOR 2022

Please understand that the dates I am about to share are TENTATIVE although they are on the schedule at Our Lady of Mercy for our next Cursillo weekends.

It is important to understand that we will not conduct any weekend if the number of candidates drops below 15. Our goal is to plan weekends when we have at least 20 candidate applications.

We are taking a different approach than years past where weekends would be scheduled and then candidates would be sought out. Our plan going forward is that we will provide weekends based on the applications we have in hand and commitments by the candidates to attend.

As of now here are our planned Erie County dates.

Men's # 251 **February 10 through February 13.**

Women's # 258 **April 28 through May 1.**

Men's # 254 **October 13 through October 16.**

Men's # 252 **To be determined in June for Elk County**
Women's # 259 **To be determined in July for Mercer County**
Men's # 253 **To be determined in August for Crawford County**

COMMUNICATION NEWS

A special thanks goes out to Pat Espin, our web master and Vicky my administrative assistant for their brainstorming and updates to the Cursillo Web Site. ***The Web site is now the most reliable source of information available to all Cursillistas.***

The site is Eriecursillo.org.

If you have any questions or comments they can be forwarded to us under the Contact tab of the web site. We will compile the questions and our responses to all will be posted under the Social/News section of the webpage.

Updates are frequent and the communication tools have expanded to allow myself and the President to post news or reflections rather than taking up space in the newsletter.

Please use the site often and if you have concerns or ideas do not hesitate to notify the office.

Our Newsletter is undergoing a major renovation to reduce the printing and postage costs of the document. You may find it humorous that until we develop a new trifold format with reduced written information, that we are reverting to the format from the 1990s. Our inventory revealed a lot of paper and envelopes that have accumulated over the years and we are working to repurpose them as we create a new format. Please be patient with us as we continue our work and development of the newsletter.

The possibility of a requested donation for paper copies and postage was discussed at the Finance council meeting for those who wish to receive a hard copy in the future rather than an electronic version we will be developing. More details will be available for the January Secretariat meeting.

Vicky has been diligently creating electronic census files for all 5400 cursillistas listed in our Parish Data System. We will be contacting many by phone to verify cellphone numbers and email addresses.

We are reviewing a web-based system that will give us the ability to send unlimited e-mails and text messages simultaneously with attachments available for the newsletter or other important files. Our goal is to significantly increase our use of electronic communication but also understand some folks do not have computers. The cellphone

communication will be quicker and more efficient and some test groups within the organization have already experienced the new technique.

Update requests are posted on the Cursillo Group Facebook page and the Website. Please submit your updated email addresses and cellphone numbers to the office.

We will be recruiting some volunteers to join us at the office for a phone bank get together as we begin to call those who seem to have out of date email addresses or inaccurate personal information.

As we will always be faced with the need to solicit time, talent, and treasure to maintain or operating expenses, we have added the option of online giving for regular donations or for memorial donations for loved ones or friends.

The program is known as WESHARE and links to donation opportunities are on the web page. The site provides the option of onetime donations or recurring donations on a weekly or monthly basis. A few cursillistas have already signed up for recurring donations and that process is quite helpful for us as we review our monthly and quarterly finances.

A huge thank you also goes out to all who contributed to Erie Gives. We received \$10655 from your generosity.

I Give Catholic is another giving opportunity in November that you will receive information about by email or on the Cursillo group Face Book page and Web Site.

I personally thank you in advance for all you give to the movement.

I also need to remind all that posting of political, controversial, or negative comments and videos on the Cursillo Group Face Book is offensive and inappropriate. We do get email message and calls regarding some posts and do our best to eliminate them. Please remember that this forum presents a face of the movement and negative postings can be harmful and cause others to wonder about the ideals of the movement.

It is also important to be cautious about posting names and health issues of individuals without their approval as certain laws govern those situations.

SECRETARIAT

Following our survey of current Secretariat members, we are facing a situation where half of the members never responded and therefore will be replaced. A posting of openings will soon be located on the website and the executive committee along with the Spiritual Director will accept requests and discuss the possibilities of filling the vacant positions by the January meeting. Most of the terms are one year in length but

some may be longer. Strong lay leadership is imperative for us as a movement as all the secretariat suggestions and ideas are consultive in nature and help the officers and Spiritual Director adjust our procedures for the best possible benefits of the movement. The same as our parishes, the group's input is vital and needed but unlike a democracy, the final outcomes rest on the appointed Director of the movement.

THE BIG NEWS

This now brings me to the biggest news of the evening. I have not hidden the fact that change would be a part of our journey into the future. I hope in this section of the presentation to present to you a “general” review of our weekends as we move forward.

Many of the changes are a result of our need to deal with the challenges of the pandemic situation but other changes are a direct result of information gathered and passed on to me by Father Dan before God called him home. The Holy Spirit works in many unique ways, and I am blessed to have spent some unique time and discussion with Father about what he was learning from all of you in his town meetings and what he thought needed to be dealt with as we move forward. His thoughts together with the support, ideas, suggestions, and directives of Bishop Persico at the meeting where he asked me to assume this position, provided a framework for what I believe we have accomplished in the best interest of the movement.

We have developed and ratified for the first time in the history of the movement, a clear set of by-laws and policies. The document has been reviewed by the diocese legal department, the PA conference of Bishops, the secretariat, and ratified by the executive officers. A PDF copy is available as well as a hard copy here in the office if anyone has any questions. The document does address certain challenging topics, but the movement is always under a microscope and we need to provide assurances that we are not being disingenuous to church teaching. At the end of the day, the teaching of the Catholic Church controls what we can and can't accept or demonstrate.

Also, for the first time in the history of the movement we have an annual working budget and meet quarterly with the Finance Board to review revenue and expenditures. Thank you, Cary Cludzinski, for your leadership and time here at the office helping Vicki and me master the skills of using Quick Books.

A new document which will be a living or fluid document covering all our talk, applications, and pertinent information will also be completed and presented to the secretariat at our January meeting.

At this time, I would like to extend thanks to the members of a group that spent many evenings and hours brainstorming, talking, and collaborating to bring about the changes I am about to share.

My COVID task force spanned thirty years of presidential leadership and included great participation and advice from members who have been part of weekend service positions as well as outside professional involvement by a member that dealt with the COVID situation and operations within the Fort LeBoeuf School District.

Please join me in a prayerful thanks to Father John Jacquell, Mark and Ellen McNerney, Joe and Rose Tarquinio, Mike and Diane Dougan, Tim and Eileen Nowakowski, Mike and Barb Cross, Brenda Jackson, Diane Miller-Faytak, Nick Heise, Sara Danowski, and my wife Pam. A better group I could not imagine because I knew I would hear honest and genuine opinions and ideas as we developed a new plan for the weekends.

Jerry Bukowski was also a valued team member as we spent countless hours at the office looking at the procedures for food preparation and serving methods.

Before I share the most controversial aspect of our plans, I need to share the following information.

WASHINGTON— On December 14, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City in Kansas, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities, issued a statement on the new COVID-19 vaccines. In their statement, the bishops address the moral concerns raised by the fact that the three vaccines that appear to be ready for distribution in the United States all have some connection to cell lines that originated with tissue taken from abortions.

With regard to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, they concluded:

“In view of the gravity of the current pandemic and the lack of availability of alternative vaccines, the reasons to accept the new COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna are sufficiently serious to justify their use, despite their remote connection to morally compromised cell lines.

“Receiving one of the COVID-19 vaccines ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of our community. In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good.”

That being said, a unanimous decision by the Executive Board based on the recommendation of the COVID Task Force, requires proof of vaccination for any level of participation with the upcoming weekends.

The reality of this situation rests in one of God’s greatest gifts to us, our freedom of choice.

Unfortunately, our choices often have consequences that can be positive or negative.

At the present time, the choice not to be vaccinated results in the consequence of not participating in a Cursillo weekend. None of us will fault you for that choice and we would hope that a similar attitude of respect would be conveyed to us who have been involved and have made the decision to move forward under these challenging circumstances.

My goal is to keep the Rectors, Assistant Rectors, and Chief Stewards in place as previously assigned to their scheduled weekends. There are some changes due to the weekend leaders based on refusals to be vaccinated. I respect everyone opinions in this matter but will be making some contacts to recruit new leaders.

All other team positions were eliminated at the time of the final cancellations and new teams are being developed.

Due to the format changes for the weekends, many of the first team members will be advisors and past president couples.

This is essential as we need to concentrate and assess the revised weekend format and the advisors and past presidents have the most experience and will require the least amount of work for preparing and delivering talks on adjusted time expectations and weekend timelines.

This will only involve the first men’s and women’s weekends at Our Lady of Mercy.

Some out of town team members will also be invited to serve as observers as we unfold the new weekend schedule, so they are better prepared for planning in their respective counties.

All current applicants will be receiving a letter from me this week explaining the vaccination situation and given the opportunity to reapply and be accepted as originally planned.

New candidate applications, sponsor recommendations, and team applications will be available on the website. We plan to have them updated, standardized for use throughout the movement, and posted as PDF files that can be completed on line to eliminate mailings. The new applications will be made available upon request by e-mail and may be reproduced to be used by parish coordinators or anyone recruiting candidates.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND that the Covid Vaccination restriction will be removed once we observe improvements in vaccination numbers and decreases in case numbers and deaths. Unlike a setting for mass or other parish functions and organizations, our goal is to do our part to control exposure and reduce any risk of the virus being transmitted at a weekend retreat. I pray daily for a return to a more normal society amidst this challenge, but until we see it our liability and care for each other is our priority.

The challenges of daily screening for everyone entering the weekend site or expecting people to pay for testing or anti-body screens was unrealistic so we have done our best to provide the best and safest Cursillo experience in the least restrictive manner.

Jerry Bukowski has been an asset in brainstorming and developing plans for preparing and serving food for the weekend.

Here are some of the plans we are working on:

- Jerry will remain as the director/coordinator of the kitchen and all its workings.
- Teams will be selected for preparation of each meal and no others will have access to the kitchen.
- The weekend menu has been reviewed and adjusted to accommodate a different style of serving the meals. Jerry was excited about the opportunity to purchase a conveyor toaster to become part of morning breakfasts.
- Outside servers will not be utilized at the present time, because we are asking the weekend stewards to be servers of buffet style meals.

- Logistics still need completed, but we hope to set up a dining area in the gym with buffet tables on the stage. This will reduce the use of Sperry Hall during the weekend.
- Saturday dinner plans and procedures will hopefully stay in place with the usual candlelight walk from the gym to team tables.
- We plan to reinstate a Jesus table among the team tables and only preregistered volunteer men with proof of vaccination will participate in serving this meal.
- Cursillo Chorale can remain provided the participants are also vaccinated.

We will no longer be providing Thursday evening snacks as you will see in a few minutes when I share some general schedule changes.

The Erie Cursillos will also no longer include the luncheon meal following the closing. My explanation of the schedule will also help you understand why. The out-of-town weekend committees will determine their inclusion of a Sunday meal for all but the Sunday Schedule will remain consistent at all Cursillo weekends.

The executive board and secretariat will be discussing an increase of the weekend suggested cost from \$90 to \$100. As always, the fee is presented but we accept whatever people can donate. The increase will help cover the loss of revenue from the closing buffet and assist us in purchasing some of the equipment and supplies we will need to provide our revised meal service.

Now I will share the results of the many hours of work and collaboration that went into weekend revisions. Our goal was to not only keep the weekend in tune with the Cursillo method but to also implement some of the ideas and thoughts presented at the various town meetings held by Father Dan. I will not be sharing every specific of the schedule until the advisors, spiritual directors, and secretariat have an adequate chance to review it.

Our next task is to revise all of the weekend manuals and Cursillo Procedures book during December.

Here are the most significant changes that were made.

Wednesday evening will still be a set up time and hopefully some folks will come forward to staff the position as set up coordinators.

Thursday evening will still be the start of the weekend. However, the candidates will not register and begin their weekend experience until Friday morning. The purpose of the change is to lessen the burden of an additional night away from children in younger families as we work to focus on a new demographic. As you will hear, there are other

valuable added components to Thursday night that resulted from brothers and sisters that have witnessed the fact that some team members develop an attitude that the weekend is for them as opposed to them being part of the team for service to the candidates.

Each day of the weekend has an assigned theme and we begin the retreat this way.

Thursday **WE ARE HERE TO SERVE**

Thursday evening would be the time for Team Members, Advisors, and Sponsors to Gather @ 7:00 to prepare for the arrival of candidates on Friday Morning.

7:00 pm Team / advisors / available sponsors arrive

Opening prayer

Introductions

Reminder to team members of being there to serve

Situational awareness discussion

Review of candidates and table assignments / adjustments may be made if necessary

Tables set up by assignments with materials, name tags, etc.

Palanca assembly in bags prepared for distribution by all present

Beds labeled by name and made up by sponsors if present

Tables prepared for continental breakfast items for AM

Kitchen crew prepare individually wrapped items ready for AM

Coffee prepared to be heated in AM / beverages ready

Team meeting and walk through

Team and sponsor prayer service for candidates and /or special intentions

9:00 pm Liturgy of the Word / Prayer intentions / Prayer

Team members may choose to spend the night if they desire.

Friday

A JOURNEY BEGINS

8:00 am Welcome and Continental Breakfast

8:30 am Sponsors depart / All gather at assigned tables

8:35 am **Rector welcome** / introduction / preliminary discussion

- Introduce Stewards
- Introduce Spiritual Directors
- Morning Prayer by Rector
- Explain and conduct Bible enthronement

We will be sending information through email, the web site, and the transformation newsletter to discuss the meaning of Palanca and requesting as we did in years past, to make the palanca a spiritual experience and not so much of a gift giving time.

We are reducing the number of palanca drop off locations and will be asking sponsors and others to either gather what you can for your candidates or drop off your general palanca letters, cards, and items at the Cursillo office or join us for the grace of working Thursday evening. As always, palanca can be dropped off at the weekend site, but admission to the site is limited.

Working as a team on Thursday evening removed considerable Palanca assembly time for the stewards. Having the tables already assembled with the candidates and all they will need also provided time adjustments for the Friday activities.

We will remind all as to the service aspect of the weekend and will conclude our time together in team prayer.

We are also planning to avoid using the OLM worship space as much as possible to avoid the need for disinfecting the area after we use it.

Without final details set, we are looking to remain in the gym as much as possible.

Saturday

LETTING GO

The schedule is similar with weekend activities as we are used to.

Sunday

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The Sunday schedule has significant time changes but contains the usual activities.

The biggest change comes at the time we know as “Break In.”

12:00 pm LUNCH

Prayer before / after meals

DISTRIBUTE PACKETS

12:45 pm BREAK

1:00 pm *President Talk*

1:25 pm **BREAK IN** (**NEW: Sponsors and guests will share in the Sunday Liturgy with the candidates and team**)

Team and helpers add chairs to the assembly to prepare for Liturgy

1:35 pm **Sunday Liturgy**

Brief Homily **NO PERSONAL WITNESS (NEW)**

2:30 pm **CLOSING**

Candidates meet with Rector in the church for final remarks

Guests and committees work to set up traditional closing arrangement

2:45 pm Rector welcome

Rector entertainment

Candidate song

Witness

Team introductions

Rector introduction

Weekend Spiritual Directors comments

Cursillo Spiritual Director comments

Graduation / Abrazo

Departure

Clean up

NEW: Closing Benediction will no longer be held as all will have the opportunity to share in the celebration of the Sunday liturgy with candidates, team, and guests.

NEW: The Cursillos held at OLM will NO LONGER provide a Sunday closing dinner for candidates, team, sponsors, and guests.

Please understand that there may well be logistical or environmental changes or edits to this new plan based on what we observe.

I am confident the experience will impact the candidates in the same wonderful ways our own weekend did. Remember that they do not know what it used to be, only we do. Our continued prayer, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and positive outlook will be paramount to our success.

It has been a challenge to wrap my head around all that has happened since the Pandemic began but even more daunting for me to have learned the things I have about the movement and its members.

The best way I can explain my underlying goal and desire is to say that I so desire to see the numbers, the spirit, the grace, the attitude, the unselfish giving, and all the blessings that came my way since 1996.

Yes, we are moving forward into a new era and worldly situation, but by taking some steps back to the glory days of old I believe we can be what God is calling us to be.

Listening to the negative opinions and comments lately by those unhappy with what is happening, has increased my personal prayer list. I will not debate the vaccination issue, I will not hold anyone's opinions against them, I will not make decisions without prayer, discernment, and consultation, and I will serve as Bishop Persico appointed me to serve.

This movement started in 1963 when 17 priests and laymen who completed Cursillo in Cleveland undertook the first Erie Cursillo for men. Since then we have had 250 Men's and 257 women's weekends.

Jesus had twelve twelve men and we know what they accomplished.

We will be back, and we will continue to build the Kingdom of God here in the Diocese of Erie and on this earth.

For those who stay to work with us, we applaud you and know the gift is in your giving.

For those who choose to leave either because of the COVID situation or any other personal reasons, we will miss you and always keep you in our prayers as Cursillo Brothers and Sisters.

And finally, for those of you who move on to other areas of ministry within your parishes or faith communities, we pray for and thank God that you are experiencing the Cursillo Movement as a way to move outside of this group to a world of Glorifying the Lord by your life.

Lets me close with a prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you will renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit

did instruct the hearts of the faithful,

grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and every enjoy

His consolation.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

BE BLESSED!

Deacon Tom