

GROUP REUNION

EMPOWERING THE BEST IN EACH OTHER

To empower someone is “to pull forth from, to call forth, to allow to emerge, to realize the potential of.” The purpose of a Group Reunion is to help each participant to reach his or her full potential in Christ. When this is done, everyone benefits and grows. This is what a Group Reunion is all about.

Most people realize about 10% of their potential. The other 90% often lies beneath a pile of fears, failures, broken dreams, painful childhood memories and guilt feelings that add up to make us feel that we are not going to make it in anything we do. And with that outlook, we usually will not. We build a self-fulfilling prophesy about what our life can be, and that prophecy limits us.

However, in the company of sympathetic, caring, loving people, we are able to open up and talk about our hang-ups and fears as well as our hopes and dreams for the future. Instead of getting negative feedback from others, we get positive reinforcement and affirmation. “I affirm you in this venture.” “I affirm this gift.” “I affirm this task in your life.” Slowly, the affirmation from those we have come to love and trust overcomes whatever negative feelings we may have internalized over the years. We are able to say, “I am worthwhile,” “I have unique gifts,” “I can accomplish these things,” “I will try again.”

THE PURPOSE OF GROUP REUNION

Jesus said, “...Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).” All men and women have friends, but “graced friendships”, where the friends meet regularly to converse about Jesus and His place in their lives, bring us closer to God. Group Reunion is a method to build such graced friendships.

The purpose of the Group Reunion is to:

- Unite members in friendship and union with Christ’s love
- Help members mature in faith, hope and love
- Do all this through sharing of Christian life
- Accelerate the conversion of each member as they represent the Jesus Movement to the world
- Strengthen each member’s commitment to evangelism in home, neighborhood, place of work, etc.

Group Reunions provide a support system that mirrors the familiar three-legged stool of the Cursillo Method. Each basic component — formation, function, and sharing — are dependent upon each other. In turn, each component also has three “legs” which are reliant on the other. Trying to do without any part of the stool will risk that the collapse of the whole system.

“We must bear in mind that Group Reunions are not held so that there may be people to attend Cursillos, but the Cursillos are held so that there are people to make a Group Reunion. And that the Cursillo is only the best means we know of for putting the soul at the necessary level to begin to make Group Reunion.”

Eduardo Bonin,
One of the founders of the
Cursillo Movement

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GROUP FORMATION

1. HISTORY-GIVING means providing the basic information members of the group need to know about each other – past, present and future. Each person is given a chance to share personal concerns, fears, failures, hopes and dreams; the significant events, people and places in his or her life; and spiritual background, emotional ups and downs, as well as present hurts and joys. Any group that fails to take the time to get to know each other in depth will find its members constantly back-tracking, infighting and misunderstanding one another.



THREE STAGES OF GROUP FORMATION

1. History Giving
2. Affirmation
3. Worship

2. AFFIRMATION grows out of history-giving and develops in exact proportion to the level of openness and honesty in the group. Affirmation means responding as a community of love, trust and acceptance to the particular needs, wants, hurts, fears and hopes, joys and dreams came into the open during the first stage. This means going the second mile with each other, in “hearing out” a sister or brother who needs to get something off his or her chest. In reaching out and literally “bearing one another up,” the group becomes a community of love.

3. WORSHIP automatically follows when fellowship and partnership in the Gospel happens – spontaneously and at times hilariously. To worship as a community means to respond collectively to the Spirit of God — in one mind, in singleness of hear — as the Christian community is described in the Book of Acts (4:32).

THREE LEVELS OF SHARING



THREE LEVELS OF SHARING

1. Mouth-to-mouth
2. Head-to-head
3. Heart-to-heart

All of us yearn for fellowship where we can feel a oneness and call forth the best in each other, or — in a word — to minister to each other as the Body of Christ. Before this can happen, however, we must risk being known – and this can be scary. We are afraid that people will reject us if they find out who we really are. So to cover up the person inside, we talk about the weather, refer to sports, tell the latest joke; and all the while, down deep inside, we are crying out for love. Love is the result of knowledge, and knowledge comes when we are willing to let another person know us as we really are.

One of the best ways to bring a group face to face with their level of commitment to each other is to ask them to evaluate their experiences according to the three levels of sharing: **mouth-to-mouth, head-to-head and heart-to-heart**. Mouth-to-mouth sharing is simply conversational doodling speaking with no significant content or purpose. Head-to-head sharing, however, is more serious in that ideas and concepts are shared, but this exchange tends to be non-personal in nature. Heart-to-heart sharing, on the other hand, lets the other person know where you stand in relation to ideas **and** how you *feel* about them on the inside. Heart-to-heart sharing could be referred to as communing, and this is what forms community.

FUNCTIONS OF A VITAL GROUP

- 1. PERSONAL GROWTH** - Being part of a Group Reunion provides time to discover yourself as a person – your unique gifts, your strengths and weaknesses, and your spiritual and intellectual formation. In other words, it is a time to help you come to grips with yourself as an individual and a whole person.
- 2. GROUP BUILDING** - Gathering as a group forms a community of love, trust and acceptance in which you feel a part of each other and can minister to each other as the Body of Christ. A group does not become a group just by sitting down together to talk. It takes time to become a group and it requires caring, sharing, forgiving and affirming in order to grow.
- 3. TASK OR MISSION** - It promotes taking responsible action individually and collectively to share Christ with others.



THREE FUNCTIONS OF A VITAL GROUP

1. Personal Growth
2. Group Building
3. Task or Mission

CREATING A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY TOGETHER

A Group Reunion can very easily sit and play verbal volleyball with each other, and this is okay, but participants shouldn't expect real Christian community to develop if this is all they do. Community happens when one person dares to say in effect, "This is the way I feel" or "In all honesty, this is where I am." "This is me...see me...know me...I want to be a part of you, and I want you to be a part of me." "I want you to know me...I want to know you deeply." When one person in a group takes the leap and decides to let the others in on his or her life, the group is under a real obligation as the Body of Christ to be the ministering servants to this person.

STEPS TO AN EMPOWERING GROUP

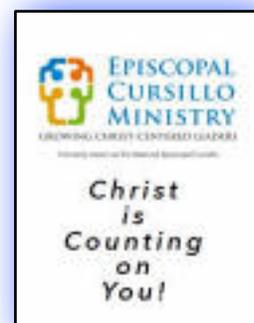
- ❑ **LISTEN, AND LET EACH PERSON TALK WITHOUT INTERRUPTION** ~ The chances are that some or all group members have never had anyone in their life really listen. The greatest thing we can offer is our ears. Many times this is all a person needs or wants. This may mean dispensing with the agenda in your Group Reunion and giving over the entire session to a person who needs to share how he or she is really feeling or hurting on the inside. After all, the purpose of the group is to empower each other, not simply to cover an agenda. The group should be sensitive at this point and be prepared to adjust the schedule. Someone can ask, "Have you said all that you want to say about this?" or, "Would you like to add anything before we go on?" or, "Are you trying to tell us something else?" These questions are empowering questions that let a person go a little deeper in his or her sharing.
- ❑ **ALLOW EACH PERSON TO TELL AS MUCH OF THEIR STORY AS THEY ARE COMFORTABLE TELLING** ~ There is a thin line between listening and probing, but it is an important one. To listen is to empower a person to say all that he or she wants to say. To probe is to make a person share what he or she does not want to say. A probing question may take the initiative away from the person who is sharing, and this could be a misstep. If someone in the group starts to probe, someone else should set in immediately with, "Let's let Bill tell it the way he sees it." or, "Why don't we give Mary a chance to finish what she has to say?"
- ❑ **AVOID GIVING ADVICE** ~ Share experience rather than advice. The cheapest thing in the world is advice. Very often the person with the least information is the most free in his or her advice, and the results are too often disastrous. If one in the group has had a similar experience, he or she can share that experience without telling the other person what to do. If a member of the group starts to give advice, someone should quickly say, "We should share our experiences, but let Helen make her own application." or, "Let's hold off on the advice and stick to our own experiences!"
- ❑ **AVOID PASSING JUDGMENT** ~ If the group is really open and honest, some sensitive areas of disagreement in lifestyle, theology and outlook are going to arise. Here is the place where love will be put to the test. When you violently disagree with John, can you give him the right to his own viewpoint? Can you not only affirm him, but release him to be himself, to think as he chooses? This doesn't mean giving in or making concessions; rather it means saying to him, "I cannot see it the way you do. However, I love you, and I accept you just as you are."

When this kind of a listening, caring, loving, and accepting situation takes place in your Group Reunion, you will know its fruits – and so will everyone else.

Remember, to empower is to call forth the best in another person, to see the best in him or her. Are you one who empowers?

THE ORDER OF REUNION

A pocket-sized card developed to provide a convenient reference for the usual Order of Reunion is generally provided at Episcopal Cursillo Weekends. For those whose card has been lost or worn, it is available for printing on the Episcopal Cursillo Ministry website (episcopalcursilloministry.com). This card also includes the Prayer of the Holy Spirit and suggested Closing Prayer. The back of the card provides a summary of potential Rule of Life goals. And, the card contains the contact addresses for the Episcopal Cursillo Ministry — a resource available to your Cursillo community.



GUIDELINES FOR FOLLOWING THE GROUP REUNION CARD

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

- Always begin with the Prayer of the Holy Spirit as printed on the card. This is the time to focus each person and call for Guidance.
- Take each item on the Reunion Card separately. It is recommended that one person not go through the whole service order at one time, but participants should take turns sharing in each section. If the items are not taken one at a time, the reunion may become mechanical.
- Remember that each person always has the option to pass a topic if they wish. As the community and trust level grows, this should occur less often.
- Each person is encouraged to say what his or her Rule of Life commitment is and how it has been fulfilled. Hearing both, the group will better understand whether or not the speaker has honored the commitment. Ideally, a Rule of Life is continually growing in depth of spirituality.

PIETY

- Group members are encouraged to comment **briefly** on the fulfilling of the Rule of Life. Discussion of apostolic ministry should be deferred to the appropriate place on the card.
- Discussion of the moment closest to Christ is intended to encourage us with the knowledge that Christ can clearly be known in our everyday experience. You might consider either of these two approaches to the question:
 1. How have I been drawn to Christ in my everyday life? This may well be through religious actions, such as the Eucharist, or through actions or events of everyday life; *or*
 2. How has Christ come to express Himself through me? How have I let Jesus show through me?
- The moment closest to Christ need not be a highly charged situation. In fact, it usually will not be. It occurs whenever you have had an experience which reminds you of Christ which makes you realize that He is at work in the world around you, or which gives you some insight into your life as a Christian.

STUDY

- What have I studied this week that has increased my understanding of my relationship with God and His Creation? Scripture? Study group? Books audio books, and/or periodicals on spirituality? Other sources? Don't just report; tell a little about what you have learned.

ACTIONS

This section addresses specific attempts to bring another person to Christ or to make him or her more aware of Christianity.

- **APOSTOLIC SUCCESS or APOSTOLIC DISAPPOINTMENT?**
When we speak of Apostolic Action in Reunion Group, we report without knowing if our efforts are a success or failure in bringing others closer to Christ. God may use those actions that seem to be disappointments to us, but we can make definite attempts to achieve certain apostolic goals. We report on our attempts, by the grace of God, to reach the goals at which we have aimed.
- **APOSTOLIC PLAN**
Ideally everyone will make some endeavor each week to help build up Christ's body – the Church – no matter how small the endeavor. It is not necessary to take a different endeavor each week. This section of the Group Reunion concerns our intentional plans to evangelize our environments. It is not meant to deal with living our daily lives, but with our effectiveness in bringing people to Christ, that is, our efforts to make various situations (family, work, parish and apostolic groups) more fully Christian.
- **THE GROUP ACTIVITY**
The group activity can be apostolic, but it doesn't have to be. Groups usually get together for something other than the reunion, in order to develop a deeper friendship in the group. The group activity can be a meal, a game, a party, as well as a visit to a hospital or some apostolic project.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER GROUP ENRICHMENT

- Pray for the success of each reunion.
- Prepare your responses ahead of time and bring something appropriate to share.
- Complete each section of the Reunion Card. Have each person contribute to that section; then move on to the next section.
- Take the promise on the Rule of Life seriously (make a serious effort to fulfill promises made). Take spiritual life seriously so as to be more and more aware that Christ is with us and working in the world. Take the Group Reunion itself seriously – be honest, be careful to keep secrets and be concerned for the others.
- Be regular. Ideally, the ongoing Group Reunion takes place every week, and everyone is there; otherwise it may not develop properly and may soon fail.
- Review the success of the Group Reunion regularly. Is the group enriching, encouraging, and supporting? Can simple changes in schedule or location be an enhancement? Is there good attendance and participation? The review can also be re-reading this publication and following the Suggested Evaluation Sheet for Group Reunion below. The review can be a group activity or an individual reflection.

SUGGESTED EVALUATION FOR GROUP REUNION

SHARING THE LOVE OF GOD

- Is a common bond in Christ ever experienced during this prayer?
 - *Does the Prayer help us to become aware of God's sacred presence during this time?*
 - *Does the Prayer help me express recognition and appreciation for God's presence in my life?*
 - *Why should this prayer be addressed to the Holy Spirit?*
- Piety – Sharing of spiritual helps
 - *Do my group members know by now the specific means of piety that I am attempting to introduce into my life? Or has my sharing been only a recital of the means I decided to use during the past week?*
 - *Do I willingly ask for help in evaluating the means I have been using?*
 - *Has the group succeeded in stimulating me to increase my piety?*
 - *Have the group members expressed concern and encouragement in my struggles with piety? e.g., by suggestions and by questioning my lack of fulfillment of certain acts of piety?*
- Moment Closest to Christ
 - *Do I realize that the sharing of this moment is an essential point of the Group Reunion?*
 - *How do I understand "moment closest to Christ"?*
 - *Do I always try to describe the details of this moment?*
 - *How can a shared "moment" become a grace to the other group members?*
 - *Is it always possible to identify a moment closest to Christ in the period of a week?*
- Study
 - *Do I have a definite plan for my study?*
 - *Do I ever plan my study according to the needs of my piety?*
 - *Do I ever consult my Spiritual Director in planning my study?*
 - *How do I share my study with the group members? Highlights, personal insights, etc.?*
 - *Do the members ever give me feedback on my sharing of study?*
 - *Have I grown in my hunger for study?*
 - *Does my study help me to deepen my understanding of the "gift of God" – the gift of Grace?*
 - *How could we as a group improve the sharing of our study?*

SHARING THE LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

- Apostolic Success
 - *Am I consciously trying to communicate Christ in my environments?*
 - *Am I doing my planning, or is it mostly a hit-or-miss approach?*
 - *Do I take time to share with the group successes in all areas of my life: family, profession and environment?*
 - *Can I differentiate between an apostolic success and a good deed?*
- Apostolic Disappointment
 - *Do I see how sharing an apostolic disappointment (as perceived by me) can be an opportunity for growth?*
 - *Why is disappointment more often evaluated by an attitude than by results?*
 - *Do I sometimes confuse apostolic disappointment with my failure to plan and carry out any apostolic action at all?*
- Future Plan
 - *What is the value of sharing a plan with the Group members?*
 - *Am I conscientious in forming a plan for each week?*
 - *Are we kind but firm in mutual accountability for making and fulfilling weekly plans for apostolic action?*

We are called by Christ to the Cursillo Ministry in order to grow in our life of grace by means of Spiritual Direction, Group Reunions and Ultreyas. The Group Reunion and Ultreya are the main aids the Cursillo Ministry gives us to keep our Christian lives conscious and growing and to make our apostolic effort effective.

If Group Reunions get mechanical and formal, or if we are not getting anything out of them, it is a sure sign we are not putting enough into them.

Group Reunions take the same idealism, dedication and spirit of charity called for in the Episcopal Cursillo Weekend. If the Group Reunions get tiresome and seem of little worth, it shows that we should believe in them more, work at them harder and so love our brothers and sisters more.

Jesus said, “When two or three are gathered together for my sake, there I am in the midst of them.” The Group Reunions are something done for His sake. He is present at them, and they should be done prayerfully with a dedication to Him that we may know, love and serve Him better.



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