

How to Sponsor a Cursillo Candidate – A Guide from the Joliet Cursillo

“Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ.”

How many times have we heard or seen that line? So many times that it might not resonate the way that it should, but that phrase encapsulates all that you really need to know and do to be a Cursillo candidate's sponsor.

The Cursillo is not a mass-marketed movement. We do not depend on mass-mailing, websites or 800 numbers to attract people. The movement grows and expands one person at a time with each potential candidate being approached (generally) on a one-to-one basis. You could describe the approach as “retail” as opposed to “wholesale”. Indeed Jesus used the one-on-one approach to good effect. Consider his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well or his conversation with Nicodemus.

In summary, the Cursillo Movement consists of proclaiming the best news of the best reality that God in Christ loves us, communicated by the best means which is friendship.

Who to Ask?

Should we apply any sort of a filter on who we can invite to attend a weekend? Yes, the person should be a Catholic in good standing, confirmed and able to receive all the Sacraments. Also, the person should be emotionally stable, without substance abuse issues and be able to participate with an open mind in the weekend experience. The Cursillo is not a counseling movement. Folks needing that level of attention need professional help.

Cursillo literature describes two types of candidates. Those who *can* go and those who *should* go.

Those who can go would meet the criteria as described above – a Catholic in good standing able to receive the Sacraments and desirous of a closer relationship with the Lord.

Those who should go meet all the aforementioned but in addition have the characteristics and qualities of natural leaders. The National Sponsorship Booklet describes them thusly:

They are individuals who are truly the backbone of their environments. They have a deep personality and are able to make their own decisions and are interiorly motivated. They are mature, responsible, concerned about the social conditions of our times and they have the ability (and desire) to live in and for community. In short, they are the natural leaders.

From the *National Sponsorship Booklet* published by The National Secretariat,
The National Cursillo® Center.

The purpose of the Cursillo is to equip the faithful with the tools and methods to meet their baptismal promise, which is to bring the Gospel of Christ into the environments in which they operate. Who better to equip to accomplish this than natural leaders?

One last word about the former category, those who can go. It is entirely possible and indeed it has occurred numerous times that people in this category are transformed into leaders as they experience the weekend encounter with themselves, with Christ and with others.

Actually, the title to this section *Who to Ask?*, has a double meaning. The most important “Who” is the Lord. As the saying goes, “Speak to God about your candidate before speaking to your candidate about Cursillo.” Quite true! Prayerful reflection about a potential candidate is essential before engaging them in dialogue.

Approaching the Candidate

Be prepared and do your homework! Are you actively participating in a small group reunion? If not, you are strongly urged to enlist the support of someone who is actively grouping as a co-sponsor. Be well versed in what the Weekend experience entails. Be prepared to summarize the weekend activities, the thrust of the talks (Piety, Study, Action, Grace, Sacraments) as well as the logistical details. Also be prepared to bear witness as to what the Cursillo experience has meant to you personally – both the weekend and Fourth Day. How has your participation in the weekend and the subsequent group reunions helped you in meeting your baptismal promise? Remember that there is no better preparation for a candidate than a personal and authentic witness of our fourth day.

It is also essential to know your candidate. Are they married? Do they have children? Where do they work? What are their interests?

Your candidate will undoubtedly have questions. You may feel as though you can address all of them and perhaps you can. In spite of this, make use of the resources available from the website to allow the potential candidate to further study the movement on their own.

Why Cursillo?, available from the Joliet Cursillo website or as a tri-fold hand-out at Ultreyas, is a good place to start. If the candidate desires more detailed information, consider the National Cursillo document *The Cursillo Movement: What Is It?*, which is also available on the website. Finally there is the document, *Apostolic Endorsements* which is a list of quotes from Pope Francis, Blessed Pope John Paul II and other church leaders about the Cursillo Movement.

Teamwork and Community

You are not in this alone. Enlist your small group reunion to assist you. Ask them to pray for the candidate. Would one of them be able to answer a question for the candidate? Perhaps someone else you know in the movement has been active longer and worked on weekend teams. Sometimes folks need to hear the same thing from multiple sources to believe what it is they are being told.

Handling Rejection

You have prayed and prepared, but nonetheless, they declined your invitation! In approaching the potential candidate and receiving something less than “yes”, you might start to feel like “Sam I Am” from the Dr. Seuss children’s book, ***Green Eggs and Ham***. Try as you might, you cannot get your friend to say “yes” when you know in your heart that your friend will find the weekend experience rewarding and life-changing. How many of us know someone who said “no” for years, only to finally say “yes” and then became one of the movement’s most tireless advocates?

If finances are the obstacle, it is important to quietly advise the candidate that cost should never be an obstacle to attending a Cursillo weekend. Raise this matter with the Pre-Cursillo Chair.

Take the “no” in stride. Perhaps it is not yet their time. Perhaps they are not yet still enough to hear the call. As Eduardo Bonnin, our founder once observed, “the Holy Spirit needs only an instant, but we need the time to become aware that He really is talking to us.”

If possible, leave open a door for the future. Mention there is another weekend in several months’ time. Your reaction to the rejection (positive and loving!) will go a long way to giving you (or someone else) the opportunity to ask them again sometime.

The Work Really Starts When You Get to “Yes”

When your candidate says “yes”, your work begins in earnest. Administratively, there is the application to complete. It comes in three parts:

- a) Candidate Application
- b) Sponsor’s Information and Evaluation
- c) Pastor’s Evaluation and Approval.

An application which is lacking any of these parts (including any signatures), will not progress to being confirmed for the weekend until the deficiencies are addressed. The completed application and fee should be mailed as early as practical, but in any event early enough so that it can be received by the Pre-Cursillo Chair by the Saturday prior to the Weekend. A timely submission ensures that the team can make appropriate arrangements for your candidate’s participation in the Weekend. If there is any concern regarding timely submission of the application, please contact the Pre-Cursillo Chair at once.

Logistics

Your candidate will receive a letter from the Pre-Cursillo Chair acknowledging receipt of their application and confirming their place on the weekend. Just before the weekend, they will receive a second letter detailing when they need to arrive, what to bring and that their sponsor will arrange for their transportation to and from the weekend.

Please also be sure the Pre-Cursillo Chair is aware of any special dietary or other special needs the candidate may have. The Chair will ensure the Weekend team is aware of these needs.

Having the sponsor drive the candidate to the weekend serves not only our long-standing tradition of providing transport, but also affords an opportunity for the sponsor and candidate to interact before the weekend and address any last minute questions which may arise.

During the Weekend

At times, a candidate’s hesitance to attend a weekend might be that there are responsibilities at home that hold the candidate back from attending. The sponsor can within reason, offer to help with these matters thereby enabling the candidate to attend the Weekend.

One more thing, pray and pray some more! It is essential that the sponsor undertake acts of Palanca during the Cursillo weekend. See the website for more details on Palanca.

After The Weekend – Entrance into the Fourth Day

The sponsor is also expected to transport the candidate (now a new Cursillista) back from the weekend. This affords a special opportunity for the new Cursillista to share the weekend experience with the sponsor. The new Cursillista will be anxious to share observations and impressions of their weekend with their sponsor.

Now arrives the most important responsibility of the sponsor, which is to facilitate the new Cursillistas entrance into the Fourth Day community, specifically into small group reunion. If the sponsor and new Cursillista are geographically proximate and of the same gender, this is often accomplished by inviting the new Cursillista into the sponsor’s small group reunion and Ultreya.

If they are geographically disparate, this process can become problematic. If the distance is not too great (say within the same diocese), the sponsor may know Cursillistas at the new Cursillista's parish who can help with identifying potential small group reunions to join. If the separation involves different states or cities, the new Cursillista has historically, in many cases, had to fend for himself in finding a small group reunion. This is not ideal. It is recommended that in these cases, the sponsor should endeavor to contact someone at the new Cursillista's parish, preferably before the weekend, to ascertain if there is a local Cursillista who can assist in the sponsoring. In this case, the Post-Cursillo Chair (aka Fourth Day Chair) can be an invaluable resource in this endeavor. If the Weekend team is aware of this situation in advance, they can place the candidate at a table with other candidates in their geographical vicinity which may lead to small group creation after the weekend.

Other Considerations of Sponsorship

In the case of married couples, it is important to speak to the spouse not attending so that you can be sure they are at peace with their spouse's decision to attend the weekend. The attending spouse is likely to undergo a change and it is important that surprise at such a transformation does not de-stabilize a marriage.

In the past, the requirement had been to have the husband attend the weekend first, followed by the wife. This is no longer enforced.

If you are a member of the Weekend Team and sponsoring a candidate, please consider enlisting fellow Cursillistas in the weekend transportation needs.

If you are considering sponsoring more than one candidate for a given weekend, please prayerfully consider whether you will be able to appropriately see to their support needs following the weekend. Most especially whether you will be able to adequately exert yourself in assisting them into small group reunion.

Ultreya!

Let's consider what Pope Francis had to say in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 8 of the index:

Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?

So now you are ready to prepare yourself to undertake the task of sponsorship! Remember to pray and keep the words of the patron Saint of Cursillo St. Paul, in mind from his letter to the Romans (10:15):

And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] good news!"

Start making tracks!