

Representatives of GET, Cursillo's European Group, met in Spain in March 2006...

Bringing Christ to the peoples of Europe

Mary Peters reports

What is special about the Cursillo Movement and what has it got to offer the world of today? These questions were debated at a meeting of GET,* Cursillo's European Group, earlier this year in Spain. Mary Peters and Anne Morgan-Jones represented England and Wales at this conference held in Cordoba in March.

The discussions followed on from the Concluding Statement at the world gathering of Cursillo in Brazil a few months earlier when concern was expressed that the original intentions of the founders were being lost in our various attempts to modernise. It was agreed that our book, Fundamental Ideas, must be re-written in good clear simple language, correcting any inaccuracies which may have crept in.

In England our mission statement states that the purpose, or charism of Cursillo is to form leaders – i.e. individuals – who through friendship will bring others to Christ. But in the USA for example, the purpose has been to evangelise the environments. We use their material, so were getting confused about that. Others have been using Cursillo for other ends - among American Indians cultural activities have crept in, the leaders in the Philippines used the Cursillo for political ends, etc. It is therefore appropriate that things be straightened out and the charisms once more defined.

Much time was given at the meeting in Cordoba discussing what we understand by the word charism. It was finally agreed that a charism was a gift of grace given by the Holy Spirit to an individual to be used for the good of the group. This individual was Eduardo Bonin, one of the founders of the movement.

The conclusions reached in Cordoba are summarised below, and these will be further explored and discussed during the next four years.

Cursillo is a movement of the church and consists of lay people, religious and clergy who act as a community of friendship and shared faith. Through its method – the Weekend, followed by regular small groupings - it has its own unique way of bringing people to Christ and encouraging them to bring others to Christ.

But there is a pressing need to find ways of ensuring Cursillo is relevant to the people of our countries today.

Within the movement we need study our charisms to ensure we all stay in line with its essential purpose. It is hoped the revision of Fundamental Ideas will help to make this more widely used and understood and therefore be a more effective tool. We also need to keep talking to one another in order to resolve current difficulties and discrepancies.

Basically we are all Christians with a common purpose to share our love of God with our neighbour. That love will be reflected in how we treat other people.

Represented at the Cordoba meeting were Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, Portugal, Gibraltar, Ireland and England. Missing were Rumania, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

Because of the smaller numbers we were able to talk much more easily to everybody and exchange ideas. We were able to give them an accurate picture of Cursillo in this country. (The Bishop in Cordoba was very surprised to hear that we had Cursillo in England!)

Each country gave its own report, and I have picked out some points of interest from each.

Austria: Cursillo is in 8 of their 9 dioceses and there are 8 Schools of Leaders. They hold 17 Weekends in a year, including one for young people, with an average attendance of about 266 people. They also hold a study Weekend and special days to study the bible. Their problems are the same as ours – difficulty in attracting participants, particularly young people, and a lack of leaders. They feel the first task of the Church, and therefore of Cursillo, is to communicate the unconditional love of God. It must be based on the Second Vatican Council and it must be done in community.

England and Wales: We have 23 dioceses, with seven Diocesan Secretariats. Three Schools of Leaders with 20 members. We hold six or seven Weekends per year. We have been successful in many areas but we still have a long way to go to raise the profile of Cursillo in our country. We need to invite more young people on our Weekends. It is difficult to find people who will take responsibility for leadership.

Germany: Cursillo is in 27 dioceses, they have 26 secretariats, but only four in the East. They have 22 schools of leaders, with 10 to 35 people in each. They hold 50 Weekends per year. Germany has economic problems. Although each person has to pay into their respective church by law, because so many are now on low salaries or unemployed this has led to financial problems for Cursillo. People have no time to take days off. They have one diocesan house for Cursillo and it is being used not only for religion but as a hostel for those who need a bed for a short time. Leaders' School is their priority and getting those who have lost their faith to make a Weekend. They too need more people in the age group 30 – 40.

Gibraltar: Next March Gibraltar will celebrate their 30th anniversary. They are enjoying a great harvest. 3,000 out of 21,000 Catholics have made a Cursillo Weekend. Three Weekends have been held in prison. They average four Weekends in a year each with an average of 20 participants. There has been a significant increase in young people aged between 22 and 32. They have a weekly Leaders' School with 50 members and it is here they have found people with commitment. Each year they have a spiritual retreat for leaders, the last one was in Fatima. Ultreyas are held weekly with Mass. Post Cursillo is a mix of spiritual and social activities. They have an annual Christmas dance and a family outing which helps build a spirit of community. There is only one diocese and they have the full support of their Bishop. They have a new Cursillo Centre which can accommodate 60 people

Ireland: Cursillo is in 7 Dioceses, They have 6 Schools of Leaders. They have spent 14 years studying the Foundational Charism.

Italy: Cursillo started in 1963 and is in 86 Dioceses. Pre and Post Cursillo are very important and the key point is the Ultreya (large group reunion).

Portugal: In the past year they have held 83 Cursillos - 43 for men, 40 for women. They have over 2000 Cursillistas, but they need more young people. One diocese has restarted Cursillo after 30 years. Later in the year they will hold a time of reflection in Fatima for spiritual directors, team leaders, and future team leaders. They have a training day for Ultreya leaders and the co-ordinators of groups.

Spain: Cursillo is active in 55 of their 60 dioceses. They had 244 Weekends last year, 84 mixed, 80 for men, and 80 for women. They have 78 Schools for Leaders with 2,300 people, who meet weekly. They have 200 Cursillo priests and enjoy a good relationship with other Movements. Spain has taken Cursillo to Guinea in Africa, where it is now in five cities. In the last four years there have been nine Spanish speaking Weekends in Paris and two in French. They hold encounters for

Schools of Leaders and Encounters for Young Leaders. Their project is to keep their Schools and the Method alive.

Gibraltar was elected to chair GET for the next four years. I am confident they will do a really good job. There is much work to be done during the next four years and we need to be part of this.

The next Pre Encounter will be in Venice in 2007.

**GET stands for Grupo Europeo Trabajo – the European Working Group – which acts as an advisory body for all member countries in Europe.*