

## President's Letter

When I joined the NECC in October 2004 I had some real concerns about the status of the Cursillo Movement around the country and the role the NECC should play in bringing life back to struggling Diocesan Movements. It was clear that there were many Diocesan Movements that some thought were doing well that were actually having problems. Some dioceses with strong Cursillo movements had had to cancel weekends. Many other dioceses were no longer holding weekends.

The NECC undertook a self-evaluation beginning in January 2006 triggered by responses to the first Annual Diocesan Questionnaire distributed in 2005 that was designed to measure the health of the Movement. Those responses, plus responses to questionnaires in 2006 and 2007, tended to show there were problems in many local movements: low participation in Fourth Day activities, weak clergy support and a decreasing number of weekends, among others. The NECC determined that its primary purpose was to help dioceses to better carry out the work of the Movement: to teach the Cursillo Method, target leaders, foster Fourth Day activities, live out the Fourth Day, and put on weekends.

And we, as NECC representatives, recognized that each of us needed to be in regular communication with our assigned dioceses, to know and understand the persons, successes and challenges of each diocese, and to be in a position to provide assistance and resources when requested. Local secretariat/commission members and NECC representatives have all worked hard on this task and the result is that there are some significant, positive changes in the Cursillo Movement that are taking place. As the song "Well, Well, Well" says, the Spirit is a-movin' all over this land.

Here are just a few examples:

**Pennsylvania.** John Clow is assigned to this diocese. The lay director called him in late summer 2007 indicating that they were in trouble. John encouraged her to have an ECLW and also met with the secretariat in November 2007 to go over what he thought they should do. The lay director reluctantly scheduled an ECLW even though she had been to past ECLW's and found them to be not very helpful. To her surprise the new format for the ECLW was wonderful and the secretariat became excited about Cursillo and bringing others to Christ. The diocese hosted a northeast district meeting in the lay director's home parish in April. She made a couple of presentations at the meeting along with other members of the secretariat and there was a consistent message that the ECLW team did a great job. Pennsylvania just had a very successful weekend and has six candidates for the secretariat positions. They are even considering another ECLW next year.

**Northwest Texas.** Jane and Mel Barnes have been faithful servants as the lay directors for this diocese for several years and have had no success in finding a successor. The diocese had to cancel two weekends in 2007 and there was little support for a team to lead a weekend scheduled for this summer. A secretariat meeting was scheduled for April 19 that would have been the last and

the NECC, particularly B. J. Roy as representative, was looking at ways to help. Then on April 20, B. J. received an e-mail from Jeff Kerr that he felt called to serve as lay director and, with God's help, to help Northwest Texas to start back on the road to recovery. He scheduled monthly meetings and is having members of the secretariat present talks developed from the books in the NEC library. The first three for May were What is Cursillo, The Secretariat and The Servant Community. Jeff wrote a wonderful talk on Fourth Day First that is printed elsewhere in this magazine. He also plans to be at the NEC Seminar in Daytona Beach. A Diocesan Movement that was about to be lost is now ready for a real turn-around.

**Arizona.** Arizona had not held weekends for ten years after having had a very active Cursillo Movement – both locally and nationally – until this year. In the interim an NECC representative continued to maintain contact with the diocese. In 2006 Bishop Kirk S. Smith and then Canon to the Ordinary Chuck Robertson (now Canon to Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts-Schori) wanted to see Cursillo revived in the diocese and encouraged lay and clergy leadership to take steps to see if that could happen. At the first meeting it was clear that most attending were in groups and there had been some ultreyas that had taken place. There was also interest in trying to revive weekends. The NECC held its quarterly meeting in Phoenix in April 2007 and met with Bishop Smith and Canon Robertson and also met with and stayed in the homes of many involved in the renewal process. A powerful ultreya was held on Saturday night. The organizing group held meetings and ultreyas around the diocese and in September set dates for weekends in April and May of this year. Bishop Smith was at the clausura for the men (eight candidates) and the opening night for the women (twenty-one candidates). Both weekends were powerful. Bishop Smith wrote in his Epistle for April 30 on the diocesan web site:

Almost 30 years in the ministry and I had never been to a Cursillo gathering-up to now. This past Sunday evening I was asked to officiate at the closing ceremony for the first Cursillo held in this Diocese in about 10 years. Saying that I was impressed would be an understatement.

For those of you who have never heard that term before, Cursillo is a movement that started in the Roman Catholic Church in Spain in 1944. The name means "short course" in Christianity, and is intended to be a highly intense and personal recommitment to one's faith. The movement has spread to other Christian denominations (the first Episcopal Cursillos were held in the 1960s). Those who complete the four-day course (during which time they are instructed by and cared for by the alums of the course), recommit their lives to Christ at the closing ceremony where they are welcomed by their families and other members of the program.

Before the Eucharist service began, each of the attendees (in this case eight men-traditionally men and women meet on separate weekends) spoke about what had happened to them over the weekend. Some were so moved they had trouble speaking. One remarked, "I have always wanted brothers, now I have found these, my brothers in Christ." It was clear that for all of them, their weekend was a life-changing experience.

What especially struck me was the liveliness of the service. We not only sang some great praise music, but it was all done with a joyfulness and energy which is often missing from much Sunday morning parish worship. One could truly feel the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Cursillo is not for everyone, but for me it serves as another example of God's powerful movement in the Diocese of Arizona. I know those eight men will return to their parishes as "spiritual sparkplugs," helping to ignite the life of their respective congregations. If you are in their parish, your life will be enriched.

So, if you have never heard of Cursillo, give it a try! But at least give thanks for the new life and vitality it will bring to our congregations (and check out the great pictures on our website!)

**Nevada.** Like Arizona, Nevada has not had a Cursillo in many years and has had no organizing group. There is now a new Bishop in Nevada who has been active in Cursillo in his prior diocese of Atlanta. He is encouraging Cursillo to be renewed and three Cursillistas from the Reno area attended the western district meeting in San Jose in April. They are organizing a secretariat and have scheduled weekends for June 2009.

**Iowa.** The first Episcopal Cursillo was held in this diocese but the movement has not been active for several years. NECC representative The Rev. Don Nesheim and Bishop Alan Scarfe, the Bishop liaison to the NECC, have begun to work with interested Cursillistas in the diocese to begin a renewal. Several attended a North Central district meeting in Des Moines in April and the first steps toward renewal have begun. The NECC will meet there in July 2009.

**Mississippi.** They have two weekends scheduled for 2008 and Bishop Duncan Gray III was on the staff for the April Cursillo. He also attended the secretariat meeting in January and stated that he wants to "re-invest" in Cursillo. He plans to advise all new seminarians in the diocese to attend a Cursillo and views the movement as an important component of the diocese. He will be encouraging clergy to support Cursillo.

**Navajoland** held an ECLW in April 2008 as the next step towards renewal of its movement. **El Camino Real** had 35 candidates at its May Cursillo, more than a 50% increase. **Long Island** had been having a decline in attendance at their weekends but in April they were full with a waiting list.

These are just some examples of the positive things that are taking place with the movement around the country. As I said the Spirit is "a-movin' all over this land."

Peace,

Ted Ederer