

My Cursillo Weekend

by Fr Keith Baltrop, Director of The Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation, (CASE), when he attended a 3-Day Cursillo Weekend in 2006.

When the time came for me to set off for my Cursillo weekend, I have to confess I asked myself what I was doing, and why I'd agreed to give up three days in the midst of a busy life when all sorts of papers were lying on my desk waiting to be dealt with, to say nothing of the various leisure activities I could have enjoyed or the friends I could have seen.

My initial decision to go on a Cursillo weekend was for what might be called professional reasons. The Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE), of which I am Director, has as part of its remit from the bishops of England and Wales, "to be a point of reference for new movements and organisations in the Catholic Church in our land." In order to fulfil that remit, we divide the major movements up among our team members, who try to keep contact with the movements assigned to them, learn what they are doing, and generally encourage them in the work of evangelisation. Since Cursillo was assigned to me, and I had never actually experienced a weekend, I thought it was a good idea to put that right.

I had somehow got the idea that we would be asked to remove our watches when we arrived (this happened to me on a Marriage Encounter weekend some years ago), so I concealed a spare watch in my bag. I need not have worried. Neither this, nor any other restriction on personal freedom, was even hinted at. The accommodation and meals were of a high standard, and the various activities of the weekend flowed naturally and in such a way that we all felt at ease very quickly.

What immediately struck me was that this was a movement in which anybody could feel at home and play as active a part as they wished. Sometimes new movements are accused of being élitist, but here I found the reverse was true. This was immediately evident in the way the speakers were introduced, not as well-known personalities or stars of the Catholic world who'd got everything together, but ordinary men and women who had simply come to share their experiences and were still very much struggling as we all are.

This came across particularly in the way the speakers were introduced by someone else with a prayer, and in the knowledge that someone was praying for them in the Chapel. Indeed we were all being prayed for, as we found after one session when we were given a pile of cards and letters from various Cursillo members in other parts of the country and the world, who in some cases had been fasting or offering other sacrifices for us.

This and other aspects of the weekend made me aware that we were participating in something which was both traditional and new. Particularly helpful was the way speakers related their experiences with great honesty, and we found we were being challenged to lead a deeper Catholic life, not as heroes in our own strength, but by the grace of God and with the support of others. This rediscovery of grace and of the vital part of the Catholic community in our lives is a treasure I will always be grateful to Cursillo for.