

Why do husbands have to make their Cursillo (kur SEE oh) before their wives?

This brief essay answers the question in stages.

Short Answer

The short answer is taken from the original purpose for Cursillo: to get men active in the practice of their religion. Cursillo is a method of spirituality initially learned over the period of a weekend that serves and supports men in their role as spiritual leaders within a family for the rest of their lives.

Longer Answer

In several European countries, especially Spain, men abdicated responsibility for the spiritual leadership of their family to their wives. Gradually, the spirituality in those countries became identified as feminine in nature and lacked a masculine affect. Catholicism became eccentric just as families do when suffering the consequences of absentee fathers. People who have worked on Cursillo teams usually agree that men's Cursillos have much to do with conversion while women's Cursillos have much to do with healing. Of course these are generalizations that do not always apply uniformly to each individual, but the characteristics are pronounced enough to be informative.

One only needs to reflect upon the European experience of Nazism to realize what happens in a culture that lacks a vital male spirituality. Its soullessness inevitability leads men to compete for the role of almighty leader. As the African proverb puts it: "When the elephants fight, the grass suffers." Scripturally, we learn that we are made of "God-stuff." (Genesis 1: 27) Male and female he made us. The healthiest families have both parents who are active in their parenting responsibilities. The Church, a worshipping family, is healthiest when both men and women are active.

Fullest Answer

The question about the Cursillo requirement that husbands make their Cursillo before their wives is almost always asked by women. Conversely, men do not ask why their wife cannot make her Cursillo first. That, in itself, ought to be informative. Perhaps it is the natural differences between males and females that is behind this phenomenon. Women tend to get their sense of well being and accomplishment by initiating and maintaining relationships. Men tend to get their sense of well being and accomplishment by solving problems. Women tend to nurture while men tend provide and protect. Again, generalizations are dangerous if applied blindly; the roles are often reversed in practice.

Picture the following scenes in your head. A wife makes her Cursillo before her husband. She returns home and begins to tell her husband about the powerful, beautiful weekend and encourages her husband to make the Cursillo. It seems probable that the husband will resist because relationships interest women more than men. Contests interest men.

If the husband makes his Cursillo first and then encourages his wife to make one, especially if the husband has not been ambitious in the practice of his religion before making the Cursillo, the wife, even if skeptical, will likely be curious enough about it to go just to find out what could energize his spirituality so much in just a weekend.

If either the wife or the husband make their Cursillo without their spouse also making it, it could be very damaging to their relationship. The result would be that Cursillo, which should build up a couple's relationship as they share faith together, now becomes a wedge that divides them.

Another reason why requiring the husband to make his Cursillo first seems unfair to wives is rooted in the misconception that Cursillo is a retreat. Cursillo is much more than a retreat. Retreats boost the spiritual and psychic energies of those who make them, but the effect of a retreat tends to be short lived. The person who has made a retreat, even the most dynamic of retreats, comes home to continue the same pattern of life they were living before they made the retreat. There is no built-in support system as there is in Cursillo except what has always been – Sunday Mass and whatever private practices they had to feed their spirituality. It also seems that the more dynamic a retreat is, the greater the danger of crashing afterward as the person is left spiritually unsupported. Cursillo is a method of spirituality that includes a responsible support system that can sustain the individual and keep them from crashing emotionally or spiritually afterward. It makes available a variety of supports including a small group of people with whom they've made their Cursillo to continue meeting and praying with together, monthly Masses, and several social occasions like the annual Cursillo picnic. These activities keep Cursillo alive as an enduring spiritual movement for all people who choose to rely upon it.

Another misconception about Cursillo is that it is religious education for adults. Memories of attending CCD when they were younger, usually under coercion from their parents, has left adults with a desire to avoid repeating the experience. This is especially true for men. Assuming that Cursillo is refreshing information for adults and little else is a misconception. Cursillo has much to do with formation, not just information. Because they tend to be task oriented, a general sense that men already know about their religion saps most, if not all desire to want to learn more. More practice of their religion, more frequent attendance at Mass or penance seems to promise more meaningless rituals, so why bother making a Cursillo. If they are honest, it is that very sense of meaninglessness, of being detached or estranged from God that is the symptom of need to revive their relationship with God and the Church.

Women already know that intense relationships are meaningful and necessary. It's a part of their make up. As mentioned earlier, they get their sense of purpose by initiating and maintaining relationships. They intuit their need to stay connected to God more so than men. There is an inclination in women toward making Cursillo that eludes men.

Another way of understanding Cursillo can be found in Jesus' life. Jesus relied heavily on parables to teach. Stories can teach what raw data cannot because they are contextualized. Data are text. Stories convey context. Think, for example, of the parable of the Prodigal Son. The richness of the relationships between the two sons with their father is fodder for our reflection on our relationship with God. Richness of the story (parable) is found in what is not said as much as in what is said.

What Jesus did during his public ministry was an “enacted parable.” Just as parables are stories that teach, Jesus life, death and resurrection exceed a spoken parable because it is lived, not just spoken: sort of like parenting. Parenthood, shared lovingly, is a story so large it far exceeds even two people’s ability to teach by telling it. Living it immerses both spouses in the grace of their shared sacrament. That is also why children thrive in homes where the parents “do love,” families “do second chances,” and individuals “keep faith” instead of keeping score.

Enacted parables are events far too large to rely solely upon words to teach. Jesus lived the lesson and empowered us to enter the story, to soak up its Spirit. *Cursillos are enacted parables*. They allow each person making their Cursillo to enter the mystery of their relationships with Christ and all the people who make the weekend with them. They experience in depth the transformative power of love.

Cursillo respects the nature of married love and rarely allows exceptions to the requirement that the husband make his Cursillo first. Allowing women indiscriminately to make their Cursillo before their husband also suggests that Cursillo is just a nice weekend experience and not a method of spirituality that can powerfully bond spouses to each other. Also, it enables the couple who share their Cursillo spirituality together to fulfill their role as the bride of Christ. This very image is used by St. Paul (Ephesians 5: 25-33). It bonds the couple to God, their Church and to each other.

Summary

The requirement that husbands make the Cursillo before their wives is countercultural. It is not the intention of the Erie Diocesan Cursillo Movement to deny the grace of this powerful method of spirituality to anyone. It makes no sense to keep people from the conversion and healing that are the evidence that the Holy Spirit works through this spiritual method. As with all things powerful, however, it is a treasure that requires judicious oversight so it does not reduce Cursillo to a nice weekend experience, a status symbol, or a club; all of which are temptations this International Movement has faced since its beginning.

Please pray with us for the fruits of the Holy Spirit to continue to change hearts and unite souls.

Fr. Dan Arnold, director