



**CURSILLO'S BEGINNINGS**  
At First Presbyterian Church of Evanston

Someone once likened Alice Rubash to a fighter pilot in the armed forces: She is always at the leading edge, at the forefront, leading the way for others to follow.

This was certainly the case with the Cursillo movement (later “Pilgrimage”) at First Presbyterian Church of Evanston; for it was Alice, whose enthusiasm brought so many of us along with her. I was asked to interview her and Norm, to download their memories for the rest of us.

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**Holly:** How did First Pres get involved with the Cursillo movement?

**Alice:** Judy Watt and Al Timm were the pastors who encouraged us. And then a group of us got together: Arlene & Fred Foster, Verna Todd, Becky Beem, Ron & Eleanor Ehresman, Bob & Gayle Hecker, to mention but a few. The Fosters had both been to a Cursillo in New Jersey, where there were two groups, separated by gender. Their experience and knowledge from that experience proved to be very useful for us all.

**Holly:** Where did you go for your first training?

**Alice:** To Oklahoma, just outside of Edmond. There were notebooks and so much helpful information provided us. Almost all of us came back filled with excitement, and the first Cursillo was under way! Oklahoma provided our first Moderator, and much of the rest of the staff, while the balance was our own members. Folks generously came from Oklahoma time after time to help us.

Training is very important, as our entire staff would simultaneously read a devotional book prayerfully as we prepared.

We eventually created a small council. Sonia Bodi was on it. Al Timm was very helpful and went on to form a Cursillo event in Detroit when he moved there.

**Holly:** When did Norm “sign on”?

**Alice** (laughing): He “signed on” after the first Cursillo. He caught the thrill of it from all that I told him, and he attended every one after that—in fact, he eventually became our national president, serving in that capacity for two years.

**Holly:** So over time it became a team effort for you and Norm?

**Alice:** Very definitely! We estimate that we have been to over 30 Cursillo/Pilgrimage events around the country. We were often surprised to discover that the weekends were not entirely scripted as we expected, for there were often subtle variations. Sharing the experience with different folks, in different places was rich. Each time we were blessed, coming away convinced that the world is good, not mad.

**Holly:** What were some of the highlights that you remember?

**Alice:** The foot washing was always meaningful.

The “Alfredo” video is so very moving every time, even though the tape is getting very old! One time a man who was orphaned when young was moved to tears by the video.

The writing of “Palanca” to others meant a lot to me—each time.

Creating the “Robes of Righteousness.” There they were: the materials spread out on our ping-pong table. I remember many of us getting together to work on them; Becky Beem was one of our leaders. We worked all day creating them.

Then there was the “Thankfulness Journal,” where our writing of the events over the three days took us from our minds into our hearts. We wrote about where we’d seen God at work in our lives. You find a little bit of heaven every time.

**Holly:** Were you always pleased with the choice of leaders and Rollo presenters?

**Alice:** It always worked out. Discernment was needed in the selection process. There was only one time when we thought we were going to have a disaster, but the Lord pulled it out. It was always for each of us a place for enrichment and growth.

**Holly:** So disasters were mostly averted?

**Alice:** Yes. Absolutely. Part of the reason for that is the Prayer Banner: So many are praying for us, for the weekend, for each participant.

**Holly:** What kind of help was offered to those giving a Rollo for the first time?

**Alice:** There is a collection of previous talks, and its available to anyone to read for inspiration. Those presenting would talk of their journeys; they would bare their souls; and they showed us how God has always been there for each of us—known or unknown, recognized or not recognized at the time.

**Holly:** Why have you recommended the Cursillo/Pilgrimage experience to so many over the years?

**Alice:** Because it is a building kind of experience with so many positive aspects: a way to be close to your faith, to deepen it; a time to take off our masks (as we did in the “Who Am I?”

exercise) and look at ourselves. We could see what is possible when people can love each other; we learned about communicating honestly with one another—in love. At first, we were strangers, then we were friends. . . .Our own family became involved after seeing our excitement and enthusiasm—our daughters, sons-in-law, and even our granddaughter Miriam. The contagion spread.

**Holly:** If you were to summarize your experience, how would you?

**Alice:** I have seen it change lives. Look at how many come back year after year! Everyone wants to return another year and serve! It is one of those “thin places” between earth and heaven. It is a place where heaven comes through. There is just so much love floating around.

*Holly Hudnut Halliday  
Cursillo Participant, Moderator, &  
Spiritual Advisor  
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