



## BECKY BEEM – Interview on Chicagoland Cursillo

Richard and I are members of the LaSalle Street Church in Chicago, following 20 years of membership in First Presbyterian Church of Evanston.

We were invited by Fred and Arlene Foster to attend Chicagoland Cursillo #1 in June 2000. Fred had told Richard some things about it, but we really didn't know what to expect. We drove to St Benedict's Abbey, in Benet Lake WI, for what we thought would be another "church retreat". But THIS turned out to be very different, unpredictable, and unexpected! I process things slowly—I like to see, and understand, how things work. I kept wondering: "How are they doing all this?" and "Why?" Well, it turned out to be a great experience.

It was an especially good experience for Richard. This weekend made a big difference in helping him feel more a part of the church. The staff was about half from Chicagoland and others from different states, including many from Oklahoma (our trainers for the first three weekends as we sought to establish a Cursillo community), Texas, and Georgia.

When asked to describe the highlights of my weekend, it was hard to separate staff weekends from my participant weekend. From the first weekend I loved the chapel times at the start of every morning—the quiet; soft music; nobody talking. The music is a powerful part of the weekend. There were so many ways to experience Christ throughout the weekend, in active, fun, engaging ways both in community and alone. I like so much that Cursillo/Pilgrimage gives permission for the church to celebrate—and to not worry about having fun! Every time I have served on staff for a weekend, in whatever capacity, I have been moved and changed.

It didn't sink in to me what Cursillo was all about until I served on staff—then I could see things in a new light. Rich and I served on staff for ChPC#3 in June 2001 with Fred Foster as Moderator, and that's when I could make sense of it all. I was a Palanca Cha and Richard was a Table Guide. I like to understand systems and how they work. On staff my reaction was: "Oh my goodness: So that's what it was all about!" You can see it as a whole when you serve on staff; how things are sequenced, how each talk and event builds. Finally, as I understood how it worked, I could better understand why it worked.

Rich and I have recommended this experience to many and have seen what a difference it can make in their lives. I'm still in a renewal group that meets every month.

I was Moderator of ChPC#8 and served on Chicagoland Council for many years. I had the privilege of representing Chicagoland by attending several National Council meetings with Norm and Alice Rubash. Each Presbyterian Cursillo/Pilgrimage community would offer to host a National Council meeting. Chicagoland hosted our first national meeting after being in existence for only 3 years—mostly because of Norm Rubash's enthusiasm and leadership. Through these meetings we heard from many communities across the country with the same struggles that we had, and it was a helpful way to share ideas and hear of different ideas and solutions. We learned that most communities grapple with the question of how to improve the weekend so as to attract more participants and how to help our 4<sup>th</sup> Day community.

We knew that for the Cursillo/Pilgrimage method to work, we had to keep our core program of 3 days, 72 hours, 15 talks. Some things have been updated. We officially changed the name of our Chicagoland community to Chicagoland Pilgrimage (to replace the original name Cursillo), talks have been updated and newer songs have been added. Jim Peterson has done a phenomenal job. He has used digital projection so that we are reading words from screen, no longer from a booklet of songs. Also, we are so grateful for our adopted Chicagoland musician and song writer, who came to our aid when we struggled to find music leaders, Tom Boehmer from Texas.

My response to that first Chicagoland Cursillo weekend was – this is something new, I've never seen anything like it. I love movies and live plays, especially being surprised at the end when it all comes together. I love leaving the theater saying “Wow! That was an incredible experience!”

That's the way I felt at my Cursillo weekend. I would not have wanted to know all about it ahead of time. It is an experience. I was glad to be viewing it fresh, through my own perspective, not through the experience of someone else. I'd be upset if someone told me the end of the movie ahead of time; similarly I was (ultimately) glad not to know about events at Cursillo/Pilgrimage ahead of time -- for that would have taken away the surprise, the magic, the miracle of it!

I am disappointed that it has been hard to get folks to commit to the weekend and to leadership in their community. Many don't want to belong to something in a way that requires an investment of time and energy. How do we engage today's generation? That is the question we continue to face.

I am grateful to those who have invested their love, time and resources in making the Pilgrimage a blessing to all who attend and to those who staff the 3-Day weekends. What joy it has brought to my life and encouragement for living in the 4<sup>th</sup> Day.