



## BOB & GAYLE HECKER – Interview on Chicagoland Cursillo Beginnings

We are at First Presbyterian Church of Evanston.

### BOB

Gayle and I became involved with Cursillo when we went to OKC #19 in 1999. The Rubashes, Sonia Bodi, and the Fosters had preceded us and had returned glowing with excitement, saying “You have to try it.” As it was first presented to us, I thought “A short course in Christianity? Is this going to be 3rd grade Sunday School? Do I really want to go for that!?” But we signed on. . . and I soon changed my mind.

In Oklahoma, they did it well and put on a good show. There was lively down-home music. Their rollos I found very helpful. One in particular was by a retired Air Force pilot, and I was very moved by it. It was easy to see how Christ had been at work in his life. (He subsequently came down with cancer and he was prayed for and cared about by Cursillo people all over the country.)

Ever since that time, rollos have been a high point for me, showing how past events have brought people to Christ and as they point to Christ at work in all of our lives. We see how the story of the rollo-giver interweaves with Christ’s story. It makes faith life real.

The Oklahoma folks visited us in Evanston several times to help us put our Cursillo together til we could fly on our own. They were so nurturing as we got started.

We joined the Fosters and the Rubashes for a first walk thru St Benedict’s. We felt it would be a good place to have our first Cursillo—and it was. We held our Cursillo weekends there for a number of years.

I liked the tempo of Cursillo — from rousing hilarity to deeply intentioned quiet. We would move easily from a hilarious skit to the quiet of Communion. I felt immersed in Christ and embraced by Christ. The way that people cared for us—staff and participants alike—was almost beyond belief.

When we started off, our license with the Catholic Church required that our Cursillos include only Presbyterians. We later modified the license so that we could include participants from other Christian denominations—so we have as a consequence drawn participants from a wider range of Christian experience. When this change was made, Cursillo became Pilgrimage.

I am so thankful for those who are leading Pilgrimage now. They have taken the Pilgrimage experience to a whole new level, making it available to Christians other than Presbyterians. I know that Norm Rubash helped that happen. Recent Pilgrimages included participants recruited from our workplaces and family members who are not Presbyterians.

We are challenged to live out what we gained from our weekend. This is the focus of the 4th day renewal groups—where people share their lives, how Christ is present and acting in their lives, and their hopes for the future. We are on a pilgrimage that is future-oriented in our journey with Christ.

Over these past twenty years I have loved my involvement with Cursillo/Pilgrimage, and I just wish I had more energy to enable me to keep going to it and contributing to it, but the time has come for me to lean back and watch others benefit from it as much as I have.

Gayle and I have gone both together and separately.

Highlights: I'll bet not everyone interviewed would choose mealtimes as a highlight, but I would! For me it was a time for having good food in community with friends old and new as we shared our life stories. The worship services were so very meaningful, the foot-washing ceremony especially so. Music—a huge part of the weekend. I can remember my frustration at not being able to hold the music and do the hand motions, but now the words are projected on the wall, so it's no longer an issue. Ever grateful for innovations—and innovators!

I was always appreciative of the stories I heard from participants who shared in very vulnerable ways what's going on in their lives. I was constantly amazed how Jesus has come to them in the valleys.

Our Saturday night serenade — the first time I heard it was in Oklahoma, and it just about blew me away. Many couldn't believe what they were hearing. And it's like that every time.

For me the skits were not such a high point; for me they were somewhat corny and dumb, but they always come through by making a point! I found it to be true that a short bad skit is better than a long bad skit.

I have recommended the weekend to others— new members in our church; one adult Sunday School class; in discipleship classes, but I was not always successful in recruiting participants! Gayle, however, has been! I'd like to see it spread into more churches. Norm has gone to Presbytery leadership to try to promote it, but without success. At present, our population draws from the north and NW side. I wish we could go further afield.

### GAYLE

When Alice & Norm came back from their time in Oklahoma, they were just aglow. Alice began to talk persuasively with me, and Bob and I went the next time. I never knew church could be like that —so wonderful, so personal, so deep. That depth has grown over the twenty years I've served.

Our renewal group first met in a room outside the sanctuary, but now we meet in our living room. The renewal groups really do renew - in spades!!!. With our own nuclear family scattered around the nation, this group has become our family, and gives us as a couple this growing Christian family.

Each time we come together, we see more of Christ as we answer the renewal group questions of how we have seen Christ's power and love and wisdom growing in our lives. And it's in the renewal groups where those going through hard times can be sustained and renewed over and over again.

I will never forget the amazing experience of what I refer to as "The Cracked Pot Cursillo." Sonia Bodi, as Moderator, called herself the greatest of the cracked pots! Eventually we all came to realize that we are cracked in countless different ways, but it is those very cracks that allow room for Christ's light to come thru. If there were no cracks, how would his Light get into us? Our Cursillo experience led us at church to become prayer companions. The Holy Spirit fills our cracks and we come to know Jesus more deeply than ever before.

"That's my story and I'm sticking to it!" (A friend in our renewal group from the beginning of Cursillo to now taught me that ending.)