



## GREG BUELL – Interview on Chicagoland Cursillo Beginnings

Kacky and I live in Northbrook and go to the Village Presbyterian Church, where I serve on staff.

In 1999 I went to Oklahoma, along with other 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. Members including Kacky Buell, Julia Baker, Cam Traut, and Martha Arntsen. Dave Handley and Sonia Bodi, were on staff.

Kacky and I were asked by Alice Rubash to observe and provide some feedback as 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. Was considering the idea of bringing Cursillo to the Chicago area. It was a huge gathering, with well over 100 people there. I was in seminary then and on staff part-time at our church at that time, First Pres Evanston. It turned out to be an amazing time for me, as God's love took hold of my heart that weekend. It became a real growth spurt for me in my faith.

So the planning for our Cursillo started: I was to be responsible for the music. I did the first, second, and fourth Cursillos as head music cha; and Andy Handley did the third. Our first Chicagoland weekends were half-staffed from Oklahoma, as they sponsored us. I created the Cursillo songbook, using less country music than they had in Oklahoma and more hymns and praise songs that were familiar to our community. Even our kids assisted in putting the songbooks together by coloring the butterflies on the cover. *De colores!*

I was on staff quite a bit in the early years, first with music and then after ordination I often served as a Spiritual Advisor, frequently as head spiritual guide. Other spiritual advisers I remember working with through the years included Al Timm and Dave Handley (1<sup>st</sup> Pres. Evanston), Judy Watt (Evanston, Palatine and then 4<sup>th</sup> Pres.); Glenda Simkins-Hoffman (River Forest), Dan McNerney (Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship), Bob Hecker (1<sup>st</sup> Pres); Susan Duff-Petersen (the Moorings) and Holly Halliday (Presbyterian Homes).

I viewed Cursillo as a catalyst for renewal within a congregation, and we all hoped that pastors from local community churches would become excited about it and tell their congregations. (Although at one point it seems as though I was the only congregational pastor serving on staff.)

In our Northbrook church community, we were able to stir some parishioners to be involved, but now it seems to have tapered off, although Wayne & Sue Arntson have stayed committed and involved. Debbie Arnspang has brought members from Willow along with her. At Southminster, Susan Duff Peterson and Jim Peterson have brought new energy to that faith community. It used to be mostly FPCE and Village that contributed to Cursillo/Pilgrimage, but it seems more balanced now. It is important that no one congregation "owns" this, so drawing from many congregations is helpful.

### HIGHLIGHTS

Joel Bakker from Oklahoma was a spiritual advisor who really ministered to me. I was always touched by the piety rollos, about sticking to your faith no matter what, feeling that this is the heartbeat of Cursillo and what the church should really be about. There are going to be difficult times, but together we can go forward. We are there to encourage one another on the journey. After hearing these rollos, I read the epistles with a new eye.

As a spiritual advisor, I loved watching the tables evolve over the wknd; it was powerful. Participants come in timid, rigid, and shy; then they change as they become friends.

I have urged many over the years to attend, including from our own congregation. For a while I was telling folks to “go and have a personal experience on your journey.” But then I realized there was a missional aspect as well, and I would urge participants to go there, then return home and be a witness to Christ; go and then share.

At the time I was at FPCE, it was a mature congregation but, yes, it could use renewal. Many parishioners had gone on retreats and had had renewal experience, but it was important to get others involved. It doesn't have to be everyone's cup of tea but it can transform lives. Becoming a missional church community can be strengthened by a Cursillo experience. Anyone I've ever invited, I've never regretted inviting. But perhaps I didn't cast the net out far enough.

My experience was life-changing and became a huge support to me during difficult times in my ministry.