



Interview with Sonia Bodi

I am a member of First Presbyterian Church of Evanston [FPCE].

My involvement with Cursillo started when I was invited by Al Timm & Norm & Alice Rubash in March 1999 to go to the gathering in Oklahoma. The Rubashes had gone and had loved it and wanted Ellen Wilson and me to go so that we could start a Cursillo at FPCE. The gathering took place in Canyon Camp.

My first time as a participant was awful—at first. I had gotten home late from my office and was too late to change clothes, so I was wearing clothes I didn't want to for a retreat weekend, which made me too dressed up for camp. We arrived late to Cursillo as well. It turned out to be very cold, and many didn't have warm enough clothing, but I was lucky since I hadn't changed clothes and had my winter coat with me.

When I finally got to my room, my roommate announced she was allergic to my cologne. I was then placed in a room for two, but three of us were in it. Then to top it off, the "Montezuma's Revenge" I had picked up in Mexico the week before took revenge on me. (I was most grateful, however, for the table provided by Cursillo with so many helpful medications.)

My criticisms initially were many: (1) every moment was accounted for, so there was no chance to unwind. (2) The praise songs we were singing were unfamiliar to me. (3) The table group I was assigned to had an air force guy who knew EVERYTHING, so with him "in charge," I simply checked out. The table conversations were really terrible as the table guides were not adequate to the task. (4) None of us seemed to like one another. (5) The art project could only be called "stupid." (6) The music was awful. (7) Most of the Rollos were not meaningful—the speakers told about what they did professionally, and their words had little to do with God! (8) Every time I went to my room there was junk on the pillow. I felt like the writer of Ecclesiastes as I muttered: "Meaningless, meaningless. All is meaningless." (9) When I saw the "Robes of Righteousness" my immediate thought was: my suitcase will burst. . . . But, of course, we weren't being given them to take home.

Everything seemed wrong.

But then on Friday the letters came—caring letters from complete strangers! One wrote me: "Stop analyzing this; just sit back and let God love you." It melted my heart.

Saturday there were even more letters. "You can do anything because it's not about you." Again these letters opened my heart. Singing "Shine, Jesus, Shine" was a help as well. None in our group got the point of "the Music Box" video, and that began to bind us together. Then there was our stupid skit—but people liked it and we even started liking each other! By the end of the weekend we had fallen in love with one another, and on Sunday we had a tough time saying "Good-bye"! We even started emailing one another.

I loved Cursillo!

The following September-October Dave Handley and I went back on staff in Oklahoma to get trained to bring it to FPCE. I served as a table guide; he as a Spiritual Advisor [SA's]. I had been given the names of my table mates ahead of time, so I had been praying, in particular, for this one man. When I told him he was the one I had been praying for, he immediately started crying. I learned that he had planned to attend Cursillo several times before, but, begin an orthopedic surgeon, he had patients on the weekend, and this was his first weekend without patients.

Greg and Kacky Buell were there as well as were Glenda and Stuart Simkins-Hoffman. We decided that at FPCE we would not have it so structured. We only had one opportunity in Oklahoma to go off on our own, so we built reflection time in to the FPCE weekend.

There were three Spiritual Advisors [SA] in Oklahoma, and they were great. I heard one of the SA's (herself a pastor) say: "For the first time in my life I understand that God loves me." (From one of these talks I learned for the first time that John Calvin had been a lawyer!)

I went every year until 2014 to the FPCE program. I never felt it repetitive. Always new. I continue to recommend it to people. I love DeKoven for the site.

More of us are increasingly aware that it's proving harder and harder to staff the weekend. Fewer and fewer have signed up to be participants. Is the season for this renewal weekend over?

This perplexes me: Folks go; have a great time; yet never come back to serve on staff!

Now The Village Presbyterian Church and Southminster have started bringing participants, and that has been helpful.

OVERVIEW

I think it's wonderful. I don't mind surprises. I like that we have built in times to be alone for reflection. I've never been keen on art projects, but there are those who are. Skits can be great fun if done in a creative group. Music is wonderful. Rollos are great. Table chas/table guides/palanca chas are all serving because they love it. I like that Pilgrimage feels safe to people. Keeping it only for participants, no outsiders, and restricting the use of cameras I think is important. I'll never forget how perturbed I was when I thought I saw a stranger in our midst; I was relieved when it turned out just to be Holly Halliday wearing a wig!

I like that activities are supposed to be in lock step, that nothing happens until everyone is there. When we had one participant who really needed to nap on the first day, eventually we let her. Another hated that there wasn't an agenda for her to see. I told her it was not a secret, and I shared it with her. (In Oklahoma, no one would share any of it, and I felt that that was unnecessarily secretive. Some just need to have a thumbnail sketch, and then they go merrily off.)

Our first Cursillo was in June and staffed by the Oklahoma group, which was "birthing" us. I was Observing Moderator [OM] to Mary Stevens, the Moderator. As Moderator the following February, I was responsible for getting the staff together. I was blessed with those God called to serve.

Each time I've gone, it has truly been a time of spiritual renewal.