



The Escarpment *Newsletter of the Wollongong Cursillo Movement*

Dear Friends,

Every year on the fifteenth of August, the Church stops to contemplate something almost too large to hold: a woman entirely spent in love, entirely surrendered to grace, taken up body and soul into the life of God. The Feast of the Assumption doesn't ask us to picture Mary escaping the world. It asks us to picture what a life fully given over to Christ actually becomes. For anyone who has made a Cursillo weekend, sat in a group reunion on a weeknight, or shown up to an Ultreya because a friend asked them to, that question should sound familiar. It's the question our whole method exists to answer - and this August, with the feast falling as it does in the quiet middle of our own diocesan year, it's worth pausing to consider just how closely the two stories, Mary's and ours, have aligned with each other.

Belief in the Assumption of Mary gained momentum after the Council of Ephesus declared Her the Mother of God in 431 AD. In the mid-5th century Jerusalem began observing a mid-August feast honouring Mary's passing, known in the east as the *Dormition* (the "falling asleep" of the Mother of God.) By the 8th century the observance had spread as far afield as Rome, where it was introduced by Pope Sergius I, and later became known as the Assumption. For over a millennium the Assumption was observed as a core liturgical feast and a cherished tradition without being formally identified as a dogma. In 1950, Pius XII declared the Assumption as a formal dogma, and August 15th a Holy Day of Obligation.

It's worth remembering that Cursillo itself has an August story. The prototype weekend - the one that gave shape to everything that followed - was held at a chalet on Cala Figuera, Mallorca, in the third week of August 1944, in the days right after the island had kept the feast of the Assumption. Eduardo Bonnín and the small group of laymen who built that first "short course in Christianity" weren't consciously staging a Marian celebration. But they were men steeped in a Spanish Catholic culture where Mary's total *fiat* to God was simply in the air they breathed that month.

The movement's roots go back further, to 1940, when young men from Mallorca prepared for a pilgrimage to the shrine of St James at Compostela - a journey

undertaken, as pilgrimages so often are, under Mary's protection. Cursillo did not invent its Marian character. It inherited it, the way a child inherits the accent of the house in which they grew.

Years ago, my former parish priest announced that there had been a painting commissioned by the archdiocese of Sydney: Our Lady of the Southern Cross. In announcing this, he also said that he would like to see a print of this painting hanging on the wall of every house in the parish.



That print now hangs in my study, watching over me as I study, research, write. I always look to the Blessed Mother for comfort and solace, and She has never failed me.

The Compostela pilgrimage in 1948 is also where we derived one of the most beloved words in our vocabulary. Medieval pilgrims called out "Ultreya!" to each other on the hardest stretches of the Camino - roughly, "onward, further still" - a cry of encouragement passed from one exhausted traveller to the next, so nobody gave up on the road. When Cursillo communities later needed a name for their regular gathering, the word was already waiting for them, worn smooth by centuries of pilgrims doing exactly what a group reunion still does: refusing to let each other quit.

That's why, wherever Cursillo has travelled since - Texas, the Philippines, Nairobi, and the Illawarra, the Shoalhaven, Macarthur and the Southern Highlands - cursillistas the world over still find themselves gathering close to August 15th. It isn't written into any manual. It's simply what happens when a movement built on total surrender keeps circling back to the one feast that names what total surrender looks like when it's finished.

There's a detail in the word *Cursillo* itself that fits this feast better than we usually notice. It simply means "short course" (three days, deliberately brief, never meant to be the point of the exercise). The weekend is short on purpose, because the life it's meant to launch is not. Mary's own "short course" might be said to be the Annunciation itself: a single encounter, a handful of verses, over in minutes. What followed was thirty-odd years of ordinary faithfulness nobody wrote down, and only at the very end, a feast.

Our weekends work the same way. Three days of grace, deliberately concentrated, exist to be spent slowly afterward, environment by environment, for decades. Anyone who has ever felt a twinge of disappointment that "real life" after a Cursillo weekend looks so unremarkable by comparison might take comfort in remembering that Mary's real life looked unremarkable too, right up until God gathered the whole of it into glory at once.



The Assumption of the Virgin, by Guido Reni. 1637¹

¹ Several variations of this painting exist. The first was completed in 1627 for Doctor Christoforo Masini, and hangs in the Santa Maria Assunta, in Catelfranco Emilia. The second was commissioned by Luigi Capponi in 1637 for a church in Perugia and is currently housed in the Musée de Beaux-Arts de Lyon. A third version was completed during 1638-9 and is preserved at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich.

Here in Wollongong, that connection isn't only historical — it's built into the ground on which we stand. In 1959, Pope John XXIII dedicated our diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and every June we keep that dedication as our patronal feast. Long before any of us made our Cursillo weekend, our diocese had already placed itself under Mary's heart.

Our own diocesan crest carries a hand of four fingers, one for each region — the waters of the Shoalhaven, the escarpment of the Illawarra, the plains of Macarthur, the hills of the Southern Highlands — a fitting image for a movement that exists to send people, hand outstretched, into their own particular corner of the world. When we talk about bringing Christ into our "environment," we are talking about one of those four fingers. Mary's Assumption and our diocese's Marian dedication both say the same thing before we've spoken a word of theology: this is a place, and a people, that believes total surrender to God is not a loss but an arrival.

It's tempting to think of the Assumption purely as Mary's reward - the last chapter of her personal story, unrelated to anything the rest of us are doing on a weeknight in a parish hall. But look again at how she got there. Long before she was assumed into glory, Mary was already living the pattern our method tries to teach: piety, study, and action, folded into one uninterrupted yes. She pondered the angel's word in her heart - that's piety. She asked, "How can this be?" and let the answer reshape her understanding - that's study. And then, "in haste," she went to the hill country to serve her cousin Elizabeth - that's action, the fruit that piety and study are supposed to produce if they're real.

That journey to Elizabeth's house is worth sitting with, because it's the oldest Cursillo story there is. Mary didn't wait until she fully understood the mystery growing in her before she went out to serve someone else. She carried Christ into another household while she herself was still absorbing what had happened to her. "Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ" is not a slogan we invented in the twentieth century. It's a description of a first-century woman walking a dusty road because someone she loved needed her.

Every cursillista knows the real test of a weekend isn't the weekend. It's the fourth day — the Monday morning, the ordinary Tuesday, the years afterward when the candles are packed away and it's just you, your group, and whatever environment God has placed you in. The Assumption is, among other things, a promise about where a fourth day faithfully lived eventually leads. Mary's whole life was an uninterrupted fourth day: no dramatic weekend of her own, just decades of quiet piety, study, and action in Nazareth, in Bethlehem, at the foot of a cross, in an upper room waiting for the Spirit. And it was precisely that patient, unspectacular faithfulness that God took up, entirely, into himself.

That should be a word of hope for every cursillista whose fourth day has gone a little quiet - the group reunion that's harder to get to than it used to be, the Ultreya that feels smaller than it once did, the friend you're still praying will make a weekend one day. The Assumption doesn't celebrate a single extraordinary act. It celebrates a whole life of ordinary *fiats*, gathered up and glorified. Nothing offered in piety, study, or action is ever wasted, even in the seasons when nothing visible seems to be happening at all.

I close, as we always do, with the movement's oldest song and greeting: De Colores - "in colours." It's a reminder that grace doesn't come to us plain or grey, but dressed, like Our Lady taken up into glory, in every colour that joy can wear. Cursillo was born in an August that had just kept the Assumption. Our diocese was dedicated to Mary's heart before many of us were born. And every fourth day we live afterward is, in its small way, an echo of hers — ordinary, hidden, and entirely worth giving to God.

De Colores!

Introducing your new secretariat:

Executive Roles:

President: Pru Hall

Vice President: Shirley Parker

Secretary: Lesley Wyatt

Treasurer: Sue Bohacs

Delegate to National Secretariat: Vanessa Smith

Palanca Secretary: Sylvia D'Souza

Appointed Positions:

Escarpment Editor: Matthew Nicholson

Ultreya Organiser: Dianne Garland

Fundraising Co-ordinator: Denise D'Amore

SOL Co-ordinator: Denise D'Amore

Resource Officer: Barbara Moussalli

To those taking on new roles, congratulations. To those continuing in roles, thank you for your dedication.

Ladies' 3 Day Weekend

Our next Ladies' 3 day weekend will be held on the 10th to 13th September.

The Lay Director is Shirley Parker, and the team has been selected.

Please leave Cursillo bookmarks in your Parishes and hand them out to whoever you think may be interested.

The Application form was attached to the last newsletter.

Gospel and Meditation at the Team Commissioning:

(Background: following my meditation on Luke 8: 1-10 at the Team commissioning, I was asked by members of the Secretariat if I would reprint this meditation in this edition of The Escarpment. After an appropriate period of reflection, this I have done [I have included the Gospel reading to refresh people's minds] – ed.)

Luke 10: 1-8 (Douay-Rheims Translation):

And after these things the Lord appointed also other seventy-two: and he sent them two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself was to come.

² And he said to them: The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send labourers into his harvest.

³ Go: Behold I send you as lambs among wolves.

⁴ Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way.

⁵ Into whatsoever house you enter, first say: Peace be to this house.

⁶ And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you.

⁷ And in the same house, remain, eating and drinking such things as they have: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Remove not from house to house.

Meditation:

The Gospel we have just heard so ably read by Shirley, was St. Luke's account of the sending of the 72. Who were the 72? Although purported lists of names exist in later sources, Eusebius of Caesarea categorically states that these lists are worthless, because no such roll existed in his time. This event is recorded only in the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel to which theologians refer as social Gospel. Why "social"? The answer may be provided in the text we have just heard. Jesus instructs the 72 to "carry neither purse, nor scrip...", in other words, to depend upon people's hospitality – on their charity.

The charism of hospitality is what Cursillo is designed to emit. When we meet the candidates at the beginning of the 3-Day weekend, they are already no longer strangers. They have had someone sponsor them, walking with them, praying for

(and with) them. We help them with practicalities, carry their bags for them up to their room, direct them to chapel, provide them with everything they need, the chas sound bells to direct and remind them when the sessions begin and end, and when lunch and morning tea commence and finish. This is much appreciated, and many of us recall fondly our first 3-Day weekend. I know I do. The fellowship at table, where members of team move easily from table to table, ensuring that each team member spends a good amount of time talking to each candidate.

Also like unto the 72, the candidates have taken a leap of faith in coming to a Cursillo 3-Day weekend. Some of them may have become lacklustre in their faith, some of them may be searching for something higher. A few of these people may just be the burdened and the heavy laden of whom Christ mentioned in Matt 13, and of whom the weeds sprang up in the form of worldly distractions and choked the life out of the Word and the peace it gives to souls. The 72 were already disciples of Jesus. The Gospel quite clearly states that fact. They were already formed by Christ's words and actions. We are formed by both the Church and the charism of Cursillo.

It seems that modern people are the busiest people in history. Consequently, it would also seem that modern man has lost all capacity for contemplation of God – the highest activity of the human soul. Therefore, we tend to drown out God in all the 'busyness' of life, all the activity. Cursillo weekends make time for this – an active listening for the voice of God which can only be heard in the stillness. That's why the 72 were sent – to "prepare the way" for the Lord, to till the soil for the Lord to set the seed, so the voice of God could be heard, and so they were prepared to receive the message. I see a connection between this and the first meditation on the first evening of a Cursillo weekend: "Know Thy self". Hearing God's voice requires a significant amount of internal preparation, meditation on one's life and on God's role in it. The phrase comes from Socrates (one of the pioneers of introspection) through his pupil Plato. Socrates' introspective technique was taken up by St Augustine, who baptised it into Christian thought, thereby giving rise to the Augustinian method of seeking God, and may be discerned in the various pronouncements of the present Holy Father.

It is, perhaps, difficult to think of oneself as being "priest, prophet, and King" – as lofty as these three designations appear, but that is what Cursillo is designed to remind candidates. Although Scripture does not hand down to us exactly what the 72 said to the people in the towns to which Christ sent them, we can infer from what was recorded of his teachings that what was given was the Gospel message – both a message of peace and a poignant reminder of their inherent dignity and worth as creatures of God. That is the essence of a Three-Day weekend. It is a reminder of a person's dignity in the eyes of God.

Cursillo Prayer Vigil



On Tuesday, August 4th, members of team gathered with parishioners of St Johns to worship before the Blessed Sacrament in our small chapel in conjunction with the regular Holy Hour occurring every Tuesday immediately following Mass. The Hour was passed in silent prayer for the members of team as they undertake training in preparation for their individual rollos and for prospective cursillistas.

Ultreya 2026 Reminder:

Ultreya venues are subject to change depending on the parish involved.

Date:	Venue:	Group:
Sat 19th Sept	Our Lady Help of Christians, 80 Demetrius Road, Rosemeadow.	Rosemeadow



The next social lunch will be held at the Campbelltown Catholic Club, 20 – 22 Camden Rd., Campbelltown, at 12pm on Friday, the 25 of September.

REUNION GROUPS

Updated 19/5/26

LOCATION	CONTACT	MEETING
<i>Eagle Vale Ladies - Day</i>	Contact Pauline Ranger 0416 497 541	2 nd Wednesday of the month at 2pm on Zoom
<i>Campbelltown Ladies – Night</i>	Contact Margaret French 0417 041 721	Third Tuesday night at 7pm on Zoom.
<i>Camden Ladies - Day</i>	Contact Dianne Garland 0418 640 373	2 nd and 4 th Thursday of month 10am in Camden.
<i>Tahmoor Ladies - Day</i>	Contact Lesley Wyatt 0488 666 326	4 th Monday of the Month 11.30am in Picton
<i>Wollongong Ladies - Day</i>	Contact Elizabeth Gill 0403 238 602	Last Monday of the month at 9:30am in Wollongong
<i>Wollongong ladies – Night</i>	Contact Pru Hall 0422 540 484	2 nd and 4 th Tuesday of the month 7pm in Wollongong
<i>Panania Ladies Group – Day</i>	Contact Trish Benn 0403 897 849	1 st Tuesday of each Month 11.30am at Panania