

7. MEANS OF GRACE, Word and Sacrament (Pastor): God's word is a living, active presence in our daily living and his word is also enfleshed in sacrament. Here Christ is seen to be THE Sacrament. As grace is imparted in the earthly elements of water, bread and wine, so in the earthly body of Christ is God's grace made real and personal, "given for you." Baptism and Holy Communion are discussed at length. Some emphasis is also given to the special times in our lives in which we experience the love and grace of God in deeply meaningful ways, for example, birth, confirmation, marriage, and death.

8. APOSTOLIC ACTION (Layperson): The apostles' action in "going into all the world" is the model for examining our evangelical vocation. We are encouraged to act in a way that fits our personality to "Make a friend, be a friend, and make another a friend of Christ." (Friendship Evangelism)

9. OBSTACLES (Pastor): The things (sin) that keep us from being aware of God's grace and following him are presented: the devil, the world, our flesh. We are the ones who do not allow Christ's atonement to overcome the obstacles; God's grace is sufficient.

10. LEADERS (Layperson): The definition and qualities of a leader are presented as well as the spiritual qualities of a Christian leader. No one possesses all of the qualities, but each possesses enough to be used in ministry to influence and lead others to Christ.

Sunday

Sunday morning's meditation, "Christ's Message to the Via de Cristo Participant" begins with the account of the transfiguration and ends with the descent from the mountain back into life and ministry. Likewise we will descend from this mountain and go back to home, job, community, church and the nitty-gritty of our daily lives. The four talks that follow build on this theme:

11. THE STUDY AND EVANGELIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT (Layperson):

What individuals can do to relate to, enrich and/or change the environment in which we live, work and play. How we can be a leavening agent in our families, at work, at church, in small groups, or with our friends. How we can bring Christ into all environments.

12. LIFE IN GRACE (Pastor): Sustaining our life of action takes regular feeding and encouragement and training - all provided within the community of faith, the church. Worship, prayer, family devotions and a weekly plan of action are presented. We are encouraged to be part of a small group to support, encourage and nurture each other while living in God's grace.

13. DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WITHIN OUR ENVIRONMENTS (Layperson):

Here the content of the Action Talk is enlarged upon. The heart and soul of Christian Community is apostolic action, something we never do alone. There is strength in community which empowers us to act. Practical resources are offered.

14. TOTAL SECURITY IN THE FOURTH DAY (Layperson):

How we find security in life is compared with the total security we have been promised by God. We tap that security through others of the Body of Christ in all walks of life by sharing our pilgrimage, encouraging, building up, strengthening and loving each other. How to form a small group is presented. After this third day, we resume our daily lives - in the fourth day. Our vocation (calling), issued in Baptism, moves us to mission. It won't be easy. We are encouraged to be leaven, not a bomb, in our home community, and to serve without being discouraged.

WHAT KIND OF WORSHIP SERVICES ARE HELD?

In the morning, before breakfast, the weekend community gathers for prayer, a portion of Scripture, some devotional readings, and a brief meditation. Each evening before bed, the community gathers for a brief devotion and prayer.

Each day the place of Scripture in our lives is dramatized with a "Bible Enthronement." A passage of Scripture related to the theme of the day is read from the Bible and then the book is placed on a stand to signify and emphasize the preeminence of its message that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.

On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday the weekend community participates in worship and Holy Communion. The sermon is usually a "shared homily" with comments from all on the meaning and application of the Word.

In a brief closing ceremony we are reminded of our part in the mission of Christ on earth - that we have been called for a purpose, outlined below.

THE FOCUS OF THE VIA DE CRISTO IS ON THE LOCAL CHURCH:

1. Supplementing what we learn in our own congregations;
2. Equipping us to help strengthen and renew the faith of other Christians and, through them, their families, congregations, and the environments in which we all live, work, and play; and
3. Encouraging men and women to grow in Christ through their
 - a. worship attendance,
 - b. Bible study participation,
 - c. congregational involvement,
 - d. stewardship,
 - e. renewed sacramental life, and
 - f. sharing the love of Christ.

A Christian renewal movement by
Laity and Clergy

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VIA DE CRISTO
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS



THE PURPOSE AND INTENT OF VIA DE CRISTO

That each of us may be more fully equipped with the power of God's grace to be an effective servant in the body of Christ.

The Via de Cristo is a method for spiritual renewal, proclaiming the truth and grace of Jesus Christ. This is effected through the power and work of the Holy Spirit. "We believe that we cannot by our own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called us through the Gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, and sanctified and kept us in true faith" (Luther's Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed).

As an instrument of renewal, Via de Cristo is one of several methods available to the church today to help renew the faith that is already a gift to believers. Via de Cristo weekends are intended primarily for baptized individuals who already know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and seek to be renewed and strengthened in their relationship with Christ and the people around them. Via de Cristo provides a particular method for living out our renewed faith, for spreading the Good News, and for being active servants in the work of God's kingdom.

Lay persons are encouraged to strengthen their partnerships with their pastors, to be "extensions," building up the body of Christ. The focus of Via de Cristo, therefore, is on the local church -- your church and my church -- to supplement what we learn in our own congregation, equipping us to help strengthen and renew the faith of other Christians and, through them, their families, congregations, and the environments in which they live, work, and play. Through the use of this method we are encouraged to persevere and grow in our faith, to become an effective channel of God's love to others, and to strengthen a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

All activity during the Via de Cristo weekend, including the talks and meditations, is undergirded with prayer and total dependence on God.

HISTORY OF VIA DE CRISTO

Via de Cristo is the Lutheran expression of the Roman Catholic Cursillo® de Cristiandad (meaning short course in Christianity). The name Via de Cristo (Way of Christ) was adopted by the National Lutheran Secretariat in 1986. We are grateful to the Roman Catholic community for sharing Cursillo® with us.

Cursillo® had its beginning in the late 1940s on the island of Majorca off the coast of Spain. Bishop Juan Hervas sadly noted that the men had very little to do with the the life of his parish, while the women were growing spiritually. To counteract this, Hervas designed a three-day study course for men to give life to the teachings of the church. It was so successful that it spread, eventually reaching the United States through Texas and Boston. The first U.S. weekend was in Spanish and had to be translated into English. The Catholic community began holding weekends in the early 1960s. Lutheran pastors eventually attended them to examine the movement as a potential method of renewal in the Lutheran Church.

Pastors who attended felt the renewal movement was excellent and, with some adjustment, could be used in the Lutheran community. The first Lutheran weekends were held in Florida and Iowa in 1972. Over the years, pastors and lay persons have been careful to make sure that the content of the talks, the worship, and the rest of the weekend were Lutheran while being faithful to the cursillo method.

Both the married and unmarried are welcome to attend. Normally men attend on one weekend and women the following weekend. Some coed, joint, or single weekends are also held. The Lutheran community has helped introduce the method to the Reformed Church in America, the United Methodist, and the Presbyterian communities. Weekends are also held in prisons.

WHAT IS TAUGHT ON A VIA DE CRISTO WEEKEND; WHAT HAPPENS?

The weekend begins Thursday evening. People get acquainted with each other, and participate in a service of Confession and Forgiveness. The next three days include talks followed by discussion, worship and fellowship. The weekend concludes on Sunday evening.

The Talks

The main part of the weekend centers around nine talks given by laypersons and five by pastors. Some of the talks utilize personal experience as a living witness to the content of the talk. Each talk is followed by a discussion period. During the first two days the table groups also draw posters depicting the talk and the discussion. In the evening table groups share the content of their discussion and the meaning of their posters with the whole group. Usually there are four to six table groups of six or more persons each. Five meditations also are given by the pastors during the worship and devotional times of the weekend.

Thursday

In Thursday's worship, two meditations are given: Know Yourself, an introspective look at our lives, what motivates us, and how we stand in relation to our God; the second is on the prodigal son parable in Luke, and how the Father sees his relationship to us, always happy to welcome us.

Friday

Friday morning's meditation is the "Three Glances of Christ" in which Jesus gazes at the Rich Young Ruler, Judas, and Peter in the midst of their denial with a look of love and longing. Five talks follow during that day:

1. IDEAL (Layperson): We are encouraged to examine our priorities in life. What is our Ideal? What goals do we set to reach it? What steps do we take to achieve it? Is it attainable?

2. GRACE (Pastor): God's "Ideal" is to love his creation. Grace is God's free gift of love to us. The Father is seen as always loving, always giving freely, no strings attached, always creating newness.

3. THE LAYPERSON AS CHURCH IN THE WORLD (Layperson): The nature of the church is defined: the local community is the nurturing, sending Body of Christ. Pastor and Laity work together to accomplish the mission of Christ - to "go and tell." Ministry is the vocation of every believer.

4. GRACE IN ACTION (Pastor): God's grace, showered on all, is also poured out in real, tangible ways in each of our lives - in relationships with spouse, children, and friends. God's spirit is in us to enable us to believe and to love. God's grace overflows our lives to touch other lives through our ministry to others.

5. PIETY (Layperson): Various kinds of piety are presented, both false and genuine. We discover that we are practicing some forms of piety, even though not feeling "pious." Piety is seen as "directing our entire life to God" as we worship, study, grow, and serve.

Saturday

Saturday morning's meditation is "The Figure of Christ." Here Christ is presented as both God and Man. Jesus is the "word made flesh dwelling among us." Jesus is completely God, existing before he created this universe, and completely human, born and as any other child. He lived the life we live, and he willingly died and rose from the dead, bearing God's grace to us in love. This theme is enlarged upon during the talks:

6. STUDY (Layperson): The role of, and need for, study in nurturing our spiritual life are explored. The goal and purpose of study, with the obstacles to overcome, are discussed along with the resources available to enrich our understanding of the faith. References to books, Bible studies, devotionals, tapes, etc., are provided.