

GROUP REUNION AND ULTREYA

Recommended Time: 45 minutes (plus optional demonstration Group Reunion)

I. Orientation

This talk presents the heart of the Via de Cristo method, Group Reunion and Ultreya, which prepares the participants for the Fourth Day. This is an enthusiastic talk. It projects joyful hope and further develops the plan of how to share Christ with the world in an intentional, planned manner, supported by the Christian community.

Christianity is meant to be lived in community. The Group Reunion is a method of developing community that encourages Christians to continue their growth in grace and to share their faith in the world. The purpose of Ultreya is to strengthen and support the Group Reunions and promote mutual encouragement in apostolic action.

The main points of the talk are:

- The principal problem in living the Christian life is perseverance.
- In order to persevere, one must be in community with others who are also striving to live the life of Christ--a balanced life of piety, study and apostolic action.
- Group Reunion is the deep relationship of a few close friends, friendship and accountability raised to the level of the divine.
- Ultreya, a reunion of groups, includes a broader spectrum of the Christian community.
- Without Ultreya it is harder for a Group Reunion to reach its purpose of sharing Christ with the world.

II. General Comments

This talk presents the Via de Cristo method of living a Christian life. It explains to the participants how they can maintain what they received during the weekend and how they can persevere in Christian growth and in witnessing in the years to come. It adds the last piece. Participants now have the whole picture.

Preparation for this talk began on the first day when the ideal of living a Christian life was presented. Participants also heard a call to dedicate their whole lives to Christ in the Piety talk. On the second day they heard that it takes a life balancing piety, study and apostolic action to be an effective apostle. The third day shows the way this is to be lived out in their lives. The piety section of the service sheet, presented in the Life in Grace talk (sometimes called the Christian Life talk) on Sunday, is the means of deepening our life in Christ. The Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments talk shows the need to work together with other Christians. The Group Reunion and Ultreya talk shows that by working together, Christians can continue their dedication to the Christian ideal and grow as effective witnesses.

The focus of this talk is the value of on-going personal relationships with other Christians to continue growing toward the apostolic ideal. Very few people can do this alone. The speaker shows by example the importance of personal friendships with other Christians who share their vision of bringing Christ to the world and describes the way these relationships can be maintained. The focus is the value of personal sharing as the heart of friendships with other Christians. Christian faith is strengthened and deepened by being shared. The talk goes on to show, by explanation and personal witness, how the

two parts of the Fourth Day program fill the needs of the participants. This structure is valuable only when people want to do something and are looking for a way to do it. The most common failure of Group Reunions is that members have not used the group for the purpose it was created, or they fail to link the group to the larger community of the Ultreya.

Group Reunion and Ultreya are treasures of Via de Cristo. The central message of this talk is the need for community and friendship in Christ and the importance of personal sharing in our lives. The talk is divided into two parts: 1) Stressing the need for sharing with our friends in order to support each other and to grow in faith and as we reach out to our environments, and 2) Illustrating how Group Reunion and Ultreya fill this basic need. The structure and purpose of the Group Reunion and Ultreya must be explained, and the speaker shares his/her personal witness of Group Reunion and shows how his/her Christian life was strengthened through Ultreya. Structure and correct technique alone are not enough for Group Reunion or Ultreya to work. It also takes lives dedicated to Christ.

This talk is the pinnacle of the weekend. Its purpose is to ready participants for Group Reunion. Too many participants have a good experience on the weekend but then don't grow in Christ or witness to their faith. The main reason is failure to participate in a Group Reunion. We must emphasize that a Christian cannot make it alone. We need accepting, loving friends who are sources of God's grace in our lives. Too often groups fail because the members do not persevere to reach true friendship. Sometimes participants do not feel accepted and leave in pain and disillusionment. The speaker should stress the need to find a friend to share with, someone who accepts us where we are and holds us accountable. We may need to try several groups to find one that works for us. It takes concentrated effort and dedication from all the group members for it to work.

Ultreya is the second half of the perseverance method. It is a gathering of Group Reunions. To achieve maximum growth requires both Group Reunion and Ultreya. Either one by itself eventually leads to disillusionment and discouragement or to a lack of personal growth.

III. Atmosphere

By the time this talk is presented, participants should be prepared to receive the idea of Group Reunion and Ultreya and understand its importance for them. The atmosphere leading to this talk is a combination of joy, fire to do the Lord's work, and concern about how to continue this closeness with God when they go home. Some may hesitate to accept the message, but the prime concern of the movement (including the weekend experience) is preparing Christians for the Fourth Day. The speaker needs to show that it is possible to continue to live life in this way after returning home.

It is important to assure the participants that this weekend experience is only the first step to a life-long growth in grace. It can shape the rest of their lives if they follow through with Group Reunion and Ultreya to sustain their growth and to receive encouragement for their apostolic action.

By this time of the weekend everyone is tired and saturated with lots of words. They need just enough of the mechanics to assure them that the method is sound and a strong witness of the method's effectiveness in the life of the speaker. They must see that it can

work for them as well as it has for the team members they encountered this weekend.

The key for the speaker is confidence. Some participants may be feeling insecure.

IV. Suggestions for Writing the Talk

This talk builds on the entire weekend. Use references to other talks and insights into the weekend so participants will understand that we are outlining a plan to extend the weekend into the rest of their lives. The talk must be strong, sharing “down” times as well as “up” times. It shows a glimpse into the life of a person who has dedicated his/her life to Christ and has learned and grown through use of the Via de Cristo method. Most of the effectiveness of the talk is through the personal examples shared. Explaining the Group Reunion card is a chance to share the daily life experiences of a Christian living the Fourth Day. As you share examples of piety, study, failures and successes in your apostolic action, your closest moment to Christ and your apostolic plan for the coming week, you are sharing your personal life.

Your goal is to motivate participants to attend Ultreya and to share their lives with Christians from other environments. The talk should explain clearly the importance of Group Reunion and Ultreya as the fruits of Via de Cristo and should give a concrete picture of what living the Fourth Day is like.

Progression of the third day talks:

The Study and Evangelization of the Environment -- the strategy.

Life in Grace -- the means of deepening contact with Christ.

Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments -- the importance of working together.

Group Reunion and Ultreya -- the Via de Cristo method of on-going relationship with other Christians.

Fourth Day -- the witness of one who has persevered in the Fourth Day.

The Group Reunion and Ultreya talk focuses on personal sharing as the heart of on-going relationships with other Christians. Lives dedicated to Christ are strengthened and deepened when shared. Fourth Day groups encourage and support us as we reach out to others with Jesus’ love.

In order for this talk to bear fruit, certain conditions must be met within your Via de Cristo community. One is that the leaders of the movement are people who are living the Via de Cristo message and making good use of the Via de Cristo method. The only way to effectively talk about this is to be part of a loving, caring Group Reunion and a lively, life-giving Ultreya that are working toward the ideal of bringing the world to Christ. These are cornerstones of Via de Cristo.

You must share the structure of Group Reunion and how this tool has been helpful in your life. Structure maintained for its own sake is destructive. It is of value only when people want to do something and are looking for a way to do it. It is only when the speaker explains the use of the structure that the participants get an idea of what Group Reunion is about. Each section of the Group Reunion card must be explained during your talk, with personal examples of how it applies to life and how everyone can use it.

We are offering a proven method. Participants must be shown that to try to go it alone is likely to be spiritual suicide. At best, they will simply resume their old life. They must see that the community offered by Via de Cristo will meet their needs. One of the ways to show the power of the method in your life is to share the personal benefits of

Group Reunion and Ultreya.

Demonstration of a Group Reunion is optional. The form used for sharing is the same as the form of a basic Group Reunion, stressing our piety, study and apostolic action. Two or three members of the team (other than the rector) should share their lives. Like the Group Reunion and Ultreya talk, this has two purposes. It gives a clear picture of what Group Reunion is like, and it gives those persons a chance to share with the participants the life they have lived during the past week. It provides another picture of developing Christian community using the Via de Cristo method, and it shows in concrete ways what the lives of these Christians has been like that week. These people should have been chosen during team formation and should be solid in their understanding and use of their Group Reunion. They should be well prepared and have something to share for all the questions about apostolic action in particular. This is an opportunity for brief personal testimony. It gives the participants a chance to see what Group Reunion is like. The demonstration must show that what is proposed on this weekend is possible and can be successful. Those participating in the demonstration need to be people who take their commitments seriously and make the effort to live the apostolic ideal. Participants don't need to be shown how Christians fail. They already know that. They need to know that the Via de Cristo method works. The group should be as natural and relaxed as possible under the circumstances. It should be less than fifteen minutes.

If a demonstration is not used, a Group Reunion should be experienced at each table, led by the table leader during discussion time. This would focus on the "how to" since they have just heard the "why." This gives the participants a taste of what a group reunion is like.

All of Sunday should present convincing testimony that the Via de Cristo method is an effective way to live the Christian ideal. Christ is counting on you.

GROUP REUNION AND ULTREYA OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. If this weekend experience simply fades into a pleasant memory, it will have little effect on the advancement of the Kingdom, either within you or in the world.
- B. God called you to this Via de Cristo weekend to:
 - 1. Direct your whole life to God. (Piety)
 - 2. Develop a fully Christian attitude by transforming your mind. (Study)
 - 3. Be an evangelizer, witnessing to Christ in your life. (Apostolic Action)
 - 4. Be God's agent for change to those you influence. (Leaders)
 - 5. Attempt to transform each of your environments into a living Christian community. (Study and Evangelization of the Environment)
 - 6. Be the Church in the world where you live. (The Layperson as the Church in the World and Developing Christian Community within Our Environments)

- C. In order to meet this challenge you need to allow the Holy Spirit to change your life and help you persevere.
- D. Via de Cristo provides a proven method to persevere. It will enable you to continue to grow in your faith and share the gospel with all parts of your world.

II. THE VIA DE CRISTO METHOD OF PERSEVERANCE

- A. Spiritual direction (by pastor or mature Christian).
- B. Group Reunion (of friends).
- C. Ultreya, (a larger Christian Community).

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE GROUP REUNION

- A. The group, based on friendship, is meant to accelerate:
 - 1. The individual spiritual growth of each member.
 - 2. The realization that the Christian community is the Church in the world. We are the Church.
 - 3. The commitment to be evangelizers in our families, neighborhoods, professions, places of work, etc.
- B. Group Reunion is the practical way of sharing our Christian faith among friends:
 - 1. To unite us with friends in order to live our lives for Jesus.
 - 2. To encourage growth and maturity in faith, hope and love.
 - 3. To form deep personal relationships based on our common ideal and values.
 - 4. To keep us accountable in carrying out our piety, study and apostolic plans.

IV. THE METHOD OF THE GROUP REUNION

- A. Sharing and planning in small groups enhances and encourages growth. So we:
 - 1. Share our piety, study and apostolic action from the previous week.
 - 2. Review our successes and failures.
 - 3. Plan how to integrate our piety, study and apostolic action into our lives for the coming week.
 - 4. Depend on the group for encouragement and strength to live the Christian life, as well as keeping us accountable for carrying out our plans.
- B. The three components of leading a balanced Christian life are reviewed weekly in a concrete way.
 - 1. Piety. How have you nourished your relationship with Jesus this week?
 - 2. Study. What have you done to deepen your understanding of Christ and His will for your life?
 - 3. Apostolic action. How have you lived out God's command to bring Christ and Christian values into our world?
- C. At this point the speaker explains the reunion card.
 - 1. Pray the "Come Holy Spirit" prayer.
 - 2. Piety
 - a. What spiritual helps have nourished your relationship with Christ this week? (John 15:5)
 - b. What moment during this past week were you most aware of the presence of Christ?
 - c. What is your plan to deepen your relationship with Jesus in the coming

- week?
3. Study
 - a. What have you done to increase your knowledge of God and His will for your life?
 - b. What was the most helpful spiritual insight from your study this week?
 - c. What is your plan for continued study?
 4. Apostolic Action
 - a. What success have you had this week in witnessing and serving in your family, work or other environments?
 - b. What disappointments have you experienced this week in witnessing and serving your family, work, or other environments?
 - c. What is your plan for apostolic action in the coming week?(Option 1 -- At this point a demonstration Group Reunion may be held.)

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

- A. Three to five people is the ideal size.
- B. Regularity. Weekly is ideal.
- C. Seriousness. The purpose of the group is living the Christian ideal. It takes commitment and earnestness.
- D. Confidentiality. Part of the gift of being listened to is knowing that what is said stays in the room and will not be repeated.
- E. Sincerity. Authentic friendships are built on openness and truth.

VI. STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

- A. Honeymoon stage.
 1. Development of a bond.
 2. Relationships deepen.
 3. Commitment to each other and to the mission.
 4. Sharing spiritual gifts, growth, and love.
- B. Disillusionment stage.
 1. At this point we must adjust the ideal as we see the human frailties in group members and they see ours. This is a difficult time for the group.
 2. To get through the disillusionment stage, we must respect each other where we are. Offer mutual support and encouragement even if we do not feel like it or our feelings were hurt. (Romans 15:7)
 3. Persevere.
- C. Reality stage. This is when true community begins.
 1. Signs this is happening include:
 - a. A conscious decision to fully commit to the group.
 - b. Acceptance of criticism, anger, etc. from others in the group.
 - c. Confidence in one another develops. Walls crumble.
 - d. Be willing to sacrifice for one another.
 - e. Masks and the need for recognition are no longer necessary.
 - f. Prayer for each other increases.
 - g. Accept the roles God has given us with humility.
 - h. Recognize God working in us; we are not doing it on our own.

- i. Embody Jesus' command to love one another.
2. More time is spent in:
 - a. Prayer and meditation.
 - b. Supporting apostolic action by group members.
 - c. Committing to regular intercession for each other.
 - d. Celebrating life events in the group.
 - e. Celebrating the grace that is happening.
 - f. Following through on commitments individually and as a group.

VII. THE GROUP AND ITS REUNION

- A. The Group is formed by the people who belong to it. It is something in and of itself.
 1. It is a group of friends who are able to give to one another because they love and trust one another.
 2. The group always exists, whether we are together or apart.
 3. The group practices and lives, "Make a friend, be a friend, bring your friend to Christ."
 4. The group is patterned on the spirit of openness and naturalness similar to the experience of your table this weekend.
 5. It will take time to find persons with whom you can build this kind of friendship and time to build true community with them.
- B. The Reunion is something that happens.
 1. The reunion makes it possible for the group:
 - a. To be formed. (exist)
 - b. To be maintained. (continue to exist)
 - c. To form and maintain a Christian spirit through a friendship which is created and strengthened by regular meetings.
 2. This is a unique friendship. Rooted in love, faith and hope, it raises friendship to the level of the divine and is an ever-present grace.
 3. The group meets in reunion because:
 - a. They are friends.
 - b. They continue to be friends.
 - c. They become closer friends because their relationship is centered in Christ.
- C. Group Reunion requires work, trust and dedication.
- D. The Group Reunion, when lived, becomes a Christian community affecting the world.
 1. To live Group Reunion is the desire to be a saint, a believer living out the Christian ideal in the world.
 2. "We do not have Group Reunion so there will be some people to attend Cursillo, but on the contrary, we have Cursillos so that there will be people to make Group Reunions." Eduardo Bonnin, the founder of the movement.
(Option 2 -- The demonstration or model reunion may be held here.)

VIII. ULTREYA -- THE REUNION OF THE GROUPS

- A. The origin of the word "Ultreya." (See clarification section.)

- B. Ultreya is a community that meets regularly, typically weekly or monthly.
 - 1. In an attitude of progressive Christian growth.
 - 2. United in one faith, one Lord, one baptism.
 - 3. Sharing and supporting each other to live a balanced Christian life, particularly giving us power in our witnessing to others.

IX. THE PURPOSE AND MISSION OF THE ULTREYA

- A. Purpose:
 - 1. To create and maintain the spirit and friendship of the local Christian community.
 - 2. To be a motivating force for all of us to live the Christian ideal and evangelize the world.
- B. Mission: To make possible the ideal of bringing Christ to the world.

X. FORMAT OF THE ULTREYA

- A. Prayer. Usually the “Come Holy Spirit” prayer begins the Ultreya.
- B. Music. Music may also be interspersed throughout the Ultreya.
- C. Reunion with people from other groups which makes possible:
 - 1. A broader vision.
 - 2. Finding persons with whom we want to group.
- D. Personal witness. How is God working in my life right now? Make it concrete, using examples from my life. Share one or more of the following:
 - 1. Piety. How I am deepening my relationship with God.
 - 2. Study. How I am growing in Christ.
 - 3. Apostolic action. How I am making a friend, being a friend, bringing that friend to Christ.
 - 4. Study and Evangelization of the Environment. How I am transforming my environment.
 - 5. Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments. How we are transforming our environments.
- E. Reactions to the witness by the community gathered.
- F. The Spiritual Director/Pastor:
 - 1. Reflects on the contents of the witness talk and the discussion that follows in light of the gospel.
 - 2. May serve the community Holy Communion.
 - 3. Is available to individuals at the conclusion of the Ultreya.
- G. Closing worship and/or prayer.
- H. There is often a social time before or after the Ultreya.

XI. CONCLUSION

- A. Living an authentic Christian life in the Church and in the world is very important.
- B. Post Via de Cristo includes Group Reunion and Ultreya. They are effective, valid tools for helping individuals live a balanced Christian life and are not an

- end in themselves.
- C. Via de Cristo encourages you to participate fully in the life of your congregation and the Church.
- D. The Via de Cristo method helps you persevere. It works!
(Option 3. A model Group Reunion may be held after the talk.)

CLARIFICATION OF THE GROUP REUNION AND ULTREYA OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. It is one thing to agree with the ideal presented in Via de Cristo and another thing to carry it out in our everyday lives.
- B. This is a review of the previous talks. It needs no further clarification.
- C. We need the Holy Spirit to be alive and working in our lives to help us persevere. We cannot do it with just our own determination.
- D. Group Reunion and Ultreya provide a proven method that enables us to persevere -- to achieve what God is calling us to be. Life in grace takes courage. God calls us to "go into all the world." Via de Cristo reminds us of this great calling. The difficult part of this is how to do it (previous talks) and how to persevere (this talk).

II. THE VIA DE CRISTO METHOD OF PERSEVERANCE

- A. Spiritual Direction: meeting regularly with a pastor, trained spiritual director or mature Christian who helps you become aware of how God is working in your life and what He is calling you to do. This helps you to stay plugged into the divine power source.
- B. Group Reunion: offers a lifestyle, one in which a few Christians become a small supportive community that will lead us to love God more (piety and study) and love our neighbor more. It means sharing our lives with others who have the same desires and with whom we can share our apostolic action. We share our lives with them and receive support, encouragement and inspiration. It is a real sharing of our lives as Christian apostles -- friendship centered in Christ.
- C. Ultreya: a group for Group Reunions. The purpose of Ultreya is to strengthen and support the Group Reunions and promote mutual encouragement in apostolic action. It broadens our sharing and witnessing, providing a larger community to sustain us.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE GROUP REUNION

There are other types of groups, i.e., prayer groups, small Bible Study groups or other small groups, that can be supportive and encouraging. However, the Via de Cristo weekend puts us "on the same page." We have heard the call to be witnesses and want to follow through on this commitment.

- A. The Group Reunion is based on friendship.
 - 1. It creates a safe place conducive to Christian growth.
 - 2. We realize that we, individually and as a group, are to be the Church in the world. Since we are the Church, Christ is counting on us.

3. This commitment to share Christ begins at home and in the groups to which we belong. Our goal is to change our environments to be more Christ-like.
- B. Group Reunion is based on sharing with friends.
1. We need support and community to live our lives as Jesus wills it.
 2. We encourage each other to deepen our relationship with the Lord and grow in faith, hope and love.
 3. This type of sharing deepens the relationship in the group. Not many people understand the type of commitment we are trying to live out in our lives, but this group shares those values and the ideal of living the Christian ideal
 4. As we share successes and failures in piety, study and apostolic action, we become more aware of ourselves, how God is touching our lives and the need to witness in our environments. By verbalizing our plans for the coming week, we make a commitment and become accountable to our Group Reunion sisters and/or brothers to carry out our plans.

IV. THE METHOD OF THE GROUP REUNION

- A. This section shows how the purpose of the movement is fulfilled in its method of sharing and planning in small groups.
- B. This section emphasizes the three legs of the tripod and how the Group Reunion helps us stay focused and develop a balanced Christian life.
- C. Reunion Card.
You should go more into detail in this section. The emphasis is on the spirit and thrust of the group.
 1. Invoking the presence of the Holy Spirit is always important. The Spirit brings us into God's presence and makes it possible to have an authentic Group Reunion. We do not do this in our own strength, but through God's power that comes to us through the Holy Spirit.
 2. Piety.
 - a. How have acts of personal piety -- worship, Holy Communion, personal prayer, etc.-- nourished your relationship with God this week? This is not a simple listing of what you did, but an awareness of a deepening relationship with God. It need not be limited to the list from the reunion card, although these are the more typical disciplines that nourish us. Use personal examples.
 - b. The closest moment to Christ is meant to make us increasingly aware of the presence of God in our lives. It is the moment that made us aware of God working in and through us. It is not necessarily an emotional experience. Use a personal example.
 3. Study
What specifically in your reading or study gave you a new insight or knowledge? What made you more aware of God's will for your life, either confirming that you are on the right path or leading you in a new direction. Use at least one example.
 4. Apostolic Action
For most of us, this is the most difficult part of the reunion card.

Deepening our relationship with God and studying, either individually or with a group, are Christian activities that support us, encourage us and make us feel safe and loved. Apostolic Action means we have to come out of our comfortable place and share with others, even non-Christians. This brings most of us out of our comfort zone. It is, however, the only way many people will ever hear the gospel.

- a. Apostolic action begins where we are. One place is within our families. Do you have children at home? Are you a grandparent? Have you nieces or nephews? What are you doing to bring these children to faith in Jesus? It does not “just happen”. It takes conscious effort. Are these children in Sunday school and/or Church? If other family members are not Christian, do you pray for them? Do you ask God to give you wisdom in knowing how to love them and when and how to witness to them?

What about neighbors, co-workers, friends? In which environment is God leading you to witness? We can't do it all at once. Are you praying for guidance? Where are you led to begin? Which of your several environments? Are there other Christians who could work together with you?

In this section you are asked to share apostolic successes. Did a child come to a deeper understanding of God's grace? Did you offer to pray for your neighbor and they opened up to you? Are you making a friend, being a friend, and making plans to bring that friend to Christ? Sometimes the first two steps of this saying take a long time. It takes patience and perseverance. Use personal examples.

- b. Our only real failure is failure to try. By reporting lost opportunities, we can be encouraged to follow through next time. Avoid creating guilt for yourself or your sisters/brothers. Even St. Paul lamented the fact that he was not able to do the things he wanted to do and did things he didn't want to do. (Romans 7:15) That includes doing or saying the wrong thing or failure to do or say the right thing. We don't like to feel vulnerable, but by sharing our failures, we can be encouraged to try again and to persevere. It takes courage to take risks, and when we take risks we sometimes fail. We often gain insight at the expense of bad judgment and mistakes. Use personal examples.
- c. Sharing your plan for piety, study and apostolic action for the next week helps you become more intentional about your growth in faith and in your witnessing. You should be realistic and not commit to too much or too little. Your group should hold you accountable to your plan. This is difficult to do, but most of us are more apt to follow through on our plans if we know we are accountable to someone.

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

- A. Two people may become dependent on one another and if one person is unable to meet there is not a group. If there are more than five people in the group, there is not adequate time for each person to share deeply.

- B. Weekly is ideal. It helps us stay focused and accountable. True friendship takes time. This weekend is 72 hours. If your group met weekly for a year, you would not have as many hours together as we have had this weekend. It takes regular participation in group to build trusting, loving relationships.
- C. This does not mean without humor or joy, but with the knowledge that living a balanced Christian life takes commitment and earnestness in carrying it out. Members of the group share their Christian growth in the context of a group, and receive affirmation that what they are doing is important.
- D. Confidentiality and trust are required for us to share deeply. What is said in the group is not to be repeated to anyone without permission.
- E. Our group should be safe enough to remove our masks and be who we truly are -- to be open and honest about ourselves, warts and all. Sometimes this hurts, but we must work through this in the safety of the group.

VI. STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

This is a further development of the concept briefly discussed in the Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments talk.

- A. Honeymoon stage has four elements.
 1. Our Christian faith unites us. Because we have the same heavenly Father, we bond as brothers and/or sisters in Christ.
 2. Our relationships deepen because of our love of God and our love, caring and concern for one another.
 3. We share ourselves and our Christian values, and we are accountable to each other in all areas of our lives. This is different from the commitment made in other groups, where we keep the remainder of our lives private.
 4. We share our spiritual gifts, our love of the Lord, our growing edges, our prayer experiences and how we experience God.

With these four elements we still have a dream and not true community. These are signs of enthusiasm and excitement. Are any of the elements missing in anyone in the group? Discussing these elements and sharing our mutual experiences solidifies the dream.

- B. Disillusion stage.

This stage is inevitable and how it is handled is crucial to the formation of true community. Many Reunion Groups fall apart at this point.

 1. Enthusiasm wanes. Members are more reluctant to share or even to take the time to meet. They want it done their way. The problems are as varied as the groups and the individuals in the group. This is the time to reevaluate the ideal individually and as a group.
 2. Give each person time to struggle with his/her self-centeredness. Respect each other's uniqueness and the time needed to embrace the ideal. Reach out to them. Be understanding. Listen with empathy. Don't abandon them to their own disillusionment. Learn to be a "wounded healer." Comfort each other about these issues and offer mutual support and encouragement even when members have hurt one another.
 3. Do not give up or let the group fall apart. Reach out to one another with love and understanding. Persevere!

C. Reality stage.

Becoming a true community is possible only when the group has successfully worked through the disillusion stage, and each person is directing his/her life to God and seeking God's will for the group. It is no longer a dream world but a community based on the reality of each other's strengths and weaknesses. We love each other in spite of it all. This takes perseverance.

VII. THE GROUP AND ITS REUNION

It takes time to develop love and trust in relationships. Because of our society's emphasis on instant gratification -- instant coffee to instant success, we expect instant Group Reunion. Only time, friendship and grace can produce a group in the Via de Cristo sense. The group is a small number of persons who have committed themselves to each other in order to share lives dedicated to Christ. The reunion is the format used by the group at a certain time and a certain place. Strangers can participate in a reunion; for example, during an Ultreya, but it is not a Group Reunion until there is an on-going commitment among the members.

A. The Group

1. Friendship is the most important element of the group, and without it there is no group. It is friendship dedicated to the Lord's service. It seeks the Lord's presence. We are united and intertwined by sharing God's word. By grace this love overflows into places (environments) touched by each person's life. God's presence is felt.
2. The love and support from the group is constant and is felt even when the group is apart.
3. The group reaches out to others in friendship and shares Christ with them.
4. Christian community felt at the table on the weekend is a taste of the Group Reunion experience.
5. Give the group time to form. You may need to try more than one group to find people with whom you are comfortable. Remember the stages of group formation. Persevere!

B. The Reunion

1. The reunion is the structure that enables the group to form, exist, and persevere. It provides a process to share with others about our relationship with Christ, the commitments we have made and our attempts to direct our lives for Christ.
2. Because of the commitment of the group members to live a grace-filled life, these friendships are unique.
3. These commitments to God and to each other are the glue that creates the special bonds in these groups, holds the group together and brings them ever closer.

C. Group Reunion requires work and dedication. Sometimes personalities or schedules clash. You may need to try several groups to find what you need, but group changes should be given prayerful consideration.

D. The Group Reunion, when lived, becomes a Christian community affecting the

world.

1. It helps us persevere in our desire to live out our faith in the world.
2. Group Reunion is the heart of the Via de Cristo method of bringing Christ to the world. An important goal of the weekend is to prepare people to participate in a Group Reunion.

VIII. Ultreya

- A. Definition. Cursillo originated on the island of Mallorca in Spain following the Spanish Civil War. This was a time of unrest in the Spanish Church, a time of decreasing influence of the church on society. The idea was to have a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James the Apostle, providing a time for the young men (and later women) to dedicate themselves to renewal of the church in society. It was a difficult climb in mountainous terrain to the shrine. The pilgrims encouraged each other as they persevered in the journey by crying joyfully to each other "Ultreya!" or Onward! as an encouragement to each other. This term was adapted to mean a gathering of pilgrims -- a gathering that would encourage them in their journey of faith.
- B. Just as your evening sharing of discussion and posters have expanded our table community to include the entire Rollo Room, the Ultreya expands your Group Reunion to include several other groups from your geographic region.
- C. Originally Ultreya met weekly, and there are a few places where this still happens. It is more typical for the Via de Cristo Ultreya to meet monthly.
- D. Ultreya is a community of Christians who are also attempting to dedicate their lives to Jesus. It is meant to be an encouragement to persevere in faith, pursuing the Christian ideal of leading a balanced Christian life of piety, study and apostolic action and bringing Christ to the world. This broader community gives us power to witness to others.

IX. PURPOSE AND MISSION OF ULTREYA

The atmosphere of the Ultreya should be encouraging. Group Reunion is not meant to exist in a vacuum. Just as "An isolated Christian is a paralyzed Christian," Group Reunions that do not get support and encouragement from the Ultreya tend to grow inward and lose the focus of the group. The group becomes an end in itself. Each Group Reunion comes back to the Ultreya to nourish and be nourished by other groups. Ultreya is for the group what the group is to the individual. It helps develop Christian community.

- A. Ultreya keeps us and our groups focused on living a balanced Christian life of piety, study and apostolic action. It encourages us in the areas in which we need to grow and persevere. It provides additional support as we reach out with God's love to evangelize our environments.
- B. Methods of perseverance for both the individual and the Group Reunions are built into the Ultreya, and the Ultreya becomes a Christian community. We need both our Group Reunion and Ultreya.

X. FORMAT OF THE ULTREYA

Ultreya combines songs, prayer, sharing and witness in an atmosphere of joy and openness. This atmosphere and the content of the Ultreya build and support the individual

groups by broadening the member's experience and horizons. It helps us grow at our own pace, but at a rate that is not often possible in other groups.

- A. Begin with prayer. Usually the prayer of the Holy Spirit opens each Ultreya.
- B. Music. Singing brings the group together and creates a mood of joy and worship.
- C. Reunion.
 - 1. The reunion segment is similar to the format of the permanent Group Reunions, but usually with different people each time. This mixing of people helps us to expand, broaden our outlook and the gain knowledge of other Christian activity in our area. We learn from each other. The sharing is not as deep and personal as the sharing in the individual Group Reunions because the level of trust has not been developed, but that does not make the Group Reunions at Ultreya invalid.
 - 2. Ultreya is also a place for people to find a Group Reunion if they do not have a group to welcome them after a weekend or if they need to find another group.
- D. Personal Witness

The person giving the witness shares his/her own piety, study, apostolic action, or his/her efforts to transform an environment by building Christian community. In other words, how Christ is working in his/her life right now. S/he can go into more detail than is possible during reunion time. We learn from this sharing. It may open up methods, plans, and concerns that we can use in our own lives. We may get new insights or be exposed to new ways of thinking and doing.

Many people become newly aware of the influences of others on them, and the influence they have had on others. Because of the variety of the witnesses given at the Ultreyas, new vistas and possibilities in serving the Lord are opened. The priesthood of all believers becomes clearer, as does the ideal of living in community with God and each other.
- E. There is discussion on the topic, a time for the community to respond to the witness talk.
- F. Spiritual Direction
 - 1. A spiritual director summarizes the witness talk and the community sharing which follows in the light of the gospel. A pastor usually does this. If none is present, a mature Christian in the group can do it.
 - 2. The pastor may have a short meditation and celebrate Communion.
 - 3. The spiritual director is also available for personal contact during the Ultreya, as s/he is on a weekend, especially during reunion time or after the Ultreya.
- G. Closing prayer or worship. This can be done in many different ways.
- H. It is optional, but a social time often precedes or follows.

XI. CONCLUSION

- A. God calls us to lead an authentic Christian life at all times and in all places.
- B. Group Reunion and Ultreya support and encourage us to lead this balanced Christian life. They are tools proven to be effective aids in living a God-filled

- life. They are not ends in and of themselves.
- C. Via de Cristo encourages us to continue to be active in the life of our congregation. This is one of our environments, and we are called to be leaders in bringing others to know Christ and grow in faith.
 - D. The Via de Cristo method is effective. Use it!

WRITE-DOWNS FOR Group Reunion AND Ultreya

The Via De Cristo method of perseverance:

1. Spiritual direction
2. Group Reunion
3. Ultreya

Words not in outline (Spiritual Direction is meeting regularly with a trained spiritual director who helps you become aware of how God is working in your life and what He is

calling you to do.)

Group Reunion is sharing our Christian faith among friends.

Method of Group Reunion

1. Share our piety, study and apostolic action in the previous week.
2. Share our plan for integrating piety, study and apostolic action into our lives in the coming week.
3. Depend on the group for encouragement, strength and accountability for carrying out our plan.

Characteristics of the group.

1. Size
2. Regularity
3. Seriousness
4. Confidentiality
5. Sincerity

Stages of Group Development

1. Honeymoon stage
2. Disillusionment stage
3. Reality stage

Group Reunion requires work, trust and dedication.

Group Reunion, when lived, becomes a Christian community affecting the world.

Ultreya—The Reunion of the Groups.