

IDEAL
(The Call to Be Fully Human)
 Recommended Time: 30 Minutes

I. Orientation

Although this is the first talk, there have been several meditations and a night of quiet reflection that challenged the participants to encounter themselves -- their anguish, their hopes and their failures. They desire to be something more. It is the beginning of a search for happiness and a fulfilling life.

The proclamation of the message of Via de Cristo begins with this talk. It is a call to be fully human -- to be all that we are created to be. It does not have a specifically religious tone, though it does leave the participant open to God's saving plan.

The intent of this talk is to explain the fundamentals of being human in the light of an ideal. This should cause the participants to feel a need to have their own ideal and to come to the conclusion that they need one to be fully human.

Although human beings are considered the crown of all creation, most people feel dissatisfied, anguished and empty. They seek happiness in false values that leave behind a sense of failure, perhaps even slavery to unworthy goals. Rather than satisfy our anxieties, false ideals activate new, insatiable desires. Everyone needs a worthwhile ideal in order to have individuality and to be truly him/herself.

This leads the participants to be able to assimilate a truth presented in the next talk: our dignity as children of God is fundamental to being a follower of Christ.

The principle points of the talk are:

- Humans are the crown of creation because they have intellect, freedom and will.
- The balance between the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of a person is a measure of human maturity.
- Self-giving is the measure of a person's human development.
- An authentic ideal gives purpose and meaning to life.
- You can discover your ideal by what you think about and how you spend your time and extra money.

II. General Comments

The five talks of the first day are intended to present the ideal of living out the life of grace. The presentation begins with this talk by asking: "What does it mean to be a person?" The answer is that people who are fully human are those who have come to grips with themselves and have learned to reach out and give of themselves, in other words, to love. The only way to reach this is through having an ideal. The talk considers what an ideal is and how it functions in a human life. At the end of the talk, the participants are asked to examine their lives to discover their ideal by asking themselves where their free time, their money and their thoughts are at this time. This shows them how they are really directing their lives and what their ideal truly is. During the talk many participants will be telling themselves that their ideal is to be a Christian.

As the opening talk, Ideal lays the foundation for the rest of the weekend: to give participants a new ideal, Christ's ideal. Via de Cristo is designed to call men and women to become saints and apostles and to be leaders in the work of Christian renewal of the world. The Ideal talk is the first step in explaining to the participants what they can

become.

The preparation for the Ideal talk is the spiritual retreat. During the first evening and the first morning meditations, participants have been asked to consider their own lives. They have been challenged to “Know Yourself” in the first Thursday evening meditation and they have been given a picture of the personality of Christ, especially His love, in the meditation on the prodigal son. In the Friday morning meditation “The Three Glances of Christ,” they were placed face to face with Christ. Jesus is looking at them, inviting them. The whole first day unfolds in the context of this meditation. The participant is faced with Christ, and each person must think about his/her own life.

The talk is divided into three major parts. The first six sections give the listener a concept of what great potential each person has. It develops quickly by describing a human as a rational being separated from the lower animals by intelligence, will and freedom. Sections III through VI explore the psychology of the human being, pointing out his/her great potential. Sections V and VI discuss the primary motivating force in life -- love. Here the ultimate act of humanity is revealed as the ability to give of oneself totally.

The second major part describes an ideal. Sections VII through IX discuss the ideal and its effect on life, showing that having an ideal is the only way to achieve the goal of being the fully alive human being described earlier.

In the third major part, section X describes the kinds of ideals. Finally, section XI presents the real purpose of the talk by giving a simple formula for helping the participants discover their own ideals.

At the end of this talk, the participant should be ready to proceed with the rest of *Via de Cristo*. The whole first day is a presentation of the life of grace as the Christian ideal. It ends with the Piety talk, which is a call to the participants to make the life of grace their authentic ideal. The first day, in other words, is built upon the structure presented in this talk. Moreover, the rest of the weekend is built upon the first day. The second day explains to the participants how to make their ideal a part of their lives. The third day explains how to bring their ideal to other people and situations -- how to spread the Christian ideal effectively and how to give and receive support by being connected to others who believe as they do.

III. Atmosphere

The participants are usually somewhat tense as the Ideal talk begins. The silent retreat portion of the weekend, a time of meditation and listening to the call of Christ, is behind them. Some will have felt nothing and some will not be moved by this experience. Others will have benefited by the silence and the introspection that was encouraged. At this point on Friday morning, however, most participants are more or less nervous, depending on their personalities. They were just seated at a table with people they do not know and are worrying about what others will think of them. Many will have heard what they will do on the weekend and now it is starting. The anxious mood will continue until the discussion time when they will begin to get to know one another and relax a little.

Nervousness is the most powerful mood at this time. The group dynamics have not yet been established, i.e., Who will talk first? Who will be quiet? Will they like me? I don't know how to take notes. I don't want to take notes. I can't talk religion. I'll show them what theology is. The thoughts will differ with each person. It will be the end of the

day before the participants feel more comfortable with each other, so this talk should steadily point the way but not dazzle them. For most people, their nervousness is shaped by the spirit of the silent retreat and the mediations of the evening before. Most will desire some sort of change in their lives; they will have been stirred by the challenges of Christ. Most will be eager to start.

If the talk is presented clearly and carefully with easy to understand examples and illustrations, the groundwork will be established for the remainder of the weekend. On the other hand, if the talk is unclear, theatrical or theoretical, the participants will turn off the speaker, and it will be difficult to arouse their interest later. The speaker should be warm, which carries with it an invitation to listen. This will help to ease the participants' nervousness, perhaps also the team members who are nervous about how the weekend will go.

Though nervous, participants are eager to begin. The atmosphere is eager and charged with anticipation. The Ideal talk should slide in, reach into their hidden sense of what is right, and then get them thinking about where they truly are in their lives and in their relationship with God.

IV. Suggestions for Preparing this Talk

This talk appeals primarily to the mind, as do the opening talks of each day. It is intended to capture the interest of the participants, provoking them to think about what it is to be a person and about what kind of ideal they have. The only urging the talk does toward living the Christian life is arousing an interest in what might be a better ideal, the possibility of becoming fully human. In other words, the talk should not be a soul-stirring call to have an ideal, but an interesting talk that raises some important points. The participants should feel afterward that they better understand something vital to them.

The Ideal talk could be described as the “pre-evangelization” talk of the Via de Cristo weekend. It prepares the way for presenting the message of Christ by considering needs in human life that are fulfilled by Christ's ideal. Because of its preparatory nature, the talk is secular. That is, it does not mention God, Christ, the Church, sin, grace, salvation, redemption or any of the things that relate directly to religion. It should not begin with prayer. There are no references to the Bible. It is a temptation to talk about religious ideas and to bring ideas from the rest of the Via de Cristo into this talk. DO NOT do this. The Ideal talk is the basis for the rest of the Via de Cristo, but it does not mention the later themes. Writing this talk requires a great deal of restraint. It is essential that this talk remains secular in nature and not deviate from its purpose.

The development of this talk calls for simplicity and clearness. It must present the ideas in a clear manner because it is the basis of the rest of the talks. It should be done in a way that gradually brings the participants to confront their own ideal. The talk should be cautious, clear and full of simple examples the listener can relate to. It should be developed in a detached manner.

It is not until the very end that the speaker should turn to the participants and say that s/he wants them to consider their ideals. This is the first time in the talk that the speaker says “you.” S/he ends by asking them to look for their real ideal. At the end of the last section, it is best if the speaker finishes with the questions, then turns and leaves the participants to think about their own answers. Nothing more need be said.

There will be two dangers the speaker must avoid in the beginning parts of the talk.

The first is the danger of making the talk too theoretical. It is not meant to be a detailed philosophical treatise on the nature of people; it is just meant to raise certain points that will help the participant to see the importance of an ideal. The speaker should not get bogged down in the first six sections or overload the participant with too much theory.

The second danger is the danger of being defensive. The speaker should not feel that s/he has to defend the idea that a person has a free will or defend the idea that a person has ideals. The speaker should just state these things in a clear way without any defensiveness. The talk is written to avoid philosophical controversies and just describes common sense facts -- that people are different from animals and these differences are important.

The manner of speaking should be natural and assured and should have conviction. The talk must be interesting, not boring, but should not be overly enthusiastic. It is a low-key talk. The examples should be illustrative. They should not be stirring examples of great things that have been done. They should not even be exciting. No personal witnessing should be used.

Immediately following the end of the talk, the rector should allow a short time to elapse (about two minutes) before introducing the discussion time. This is to allow the participants a period of reflection before the first discussion time.

IDEAL OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

Now is the moment to stop and think! What is the meaning and direction of my life?

II. HUMANS AS SUPERIOR BEINGS

- A. The three natural kingdoms.
 - 1. Mineral - Lifeless
 - 2. Plant - Life
 - 3. Animal
 - a. Animal - Instinct
 - b. Human - Rational life
- B. Humans are superior to plants and animals because they can think, and they move in a world of ideas. People are the crown of creation because they have:
 - 1. Intellect - to think about ideas, to seek the truth.
 - 2. Freedom - to choose, to give preference to, to make decisions.
 - 3. Will - to act, to move toward that which is desired.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF BEING HUMAN

- A. The instincts and habits that condition animals' lives limit them. Humans do not have these limitations.
- B. For human beings, life in itself cannot be a goal. People can shape their own destiny based on decisions they make. People are always developing, always becoming.
- C. People, using all of their faculties, are responsible for the consequences, foreseen or not, of their actions.

- D. Nevertheless, human beings are the only creatures in danger of losing their essence and identity. This dehumanization may lead the person, by excess or by default, to:
1. Materialism - toward the purely material.
 2. Spiritualism - toward the purely spiritual.
 3. Intellectualism - toward the purely intellectual.
- (Give brief examples.)
- E. People must balance their lives. This permits them to grow and develop within themselves and in their relationships with others. In this balance a person becomes more fully human. The balance of the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of a person is a measure of human maturity.

IV. BEING HUMAN - THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

- A. Despite human progress, evil, injustice and unhappiness still plague our world.
- B. Each person has an overpowering desire for happiness and self-fulfillment.
- C. Self-centeredness is humanity's greatest limitation.
- D. Each person has enormous potential due to his/her innate talents.
- E. A person's potential is best realized by setting goals.
- F. Limitations of this potential create frustration and restlessness.

An example of someone who exemplifies the development of his/her gifts and talents to their fullest extent is appropriate here.

V. SELF-GIVING IS THE MEASURE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

- A. Giving oneself totally is the highest personal and creative act a person can accomplish.
- B. A person must develop all of his/her talents in order to give of him/herself totally.
- C. Giving of self can be directed toward:
 1. Self.
 2. Objects/things.
 3. Ideas.
 4. People.
- D. The focus of a person's life limits or expands the meaning of his/her life.

VI. THE PROCESS OF BECOMING FULLY HUMAN

- A. A mature person is master of his/her own life.
- B. The process of becoming human is to:
 1. Choose a goal.
 2. Gain conviction for that goal.
 3. Let the goal fulfill his/her aspirations.
 4. Allow the goal to set the criteria of his/her actions.
 5. Have the achieving of the goal become a way of life.
- C. Every person has a goal, an ideal.

VII. WHAT IS AN IDEAL?

- A. An ideal is the center of our goals. It is the combination of ideas, aspirations and preferences that attracts a person and moves him/her toward its fulfillment. It sums up happiness for the person. It is the axis of the person's life, around which everything moves.
- B. An ideal has two elements. Both must be present or it is not an ideal.
 - 1. Vision - the combination of ideas, aspirations, and preferences in a person's life. Vision is static. Like the chassis of a car, it gives framework to the whole.
 - 2. Motivation - the force which moves a person to achieve a vision. Motivation is dynamic. Like the engine of a car, motivation gives power or drive. Without vision we cannot know our ideal. Without motivation we cannot move toward accomplishing the ideal. Therefore, both the object and the extent of self-giving define a person's ideal.
- C. A person's life ebbs and flows according to his/her ideal.
- D. The ideal in one's life may change.
The ideal may be different in childhood, youth and maturity. Life events may also change a person's ideal.
- E. Because all people have goals, there is no one who does not have an ideal.

VIII. QUALITIES OF AN AUTHENTIC IDEAL

An ideal is capable of satisfying a person's every need.

- A. It is vital. It provides great meaning.
- B. It is complete. We are able to direct our whole life toward this ideal because it leads us to maturity.
 - 1. It has definable goals.
 - 2. These goals will fulfill our present and future needs.
 - 3. These goals will always inspire us to reach out and give of ourselves.
 - 4. These goals challenge us to fulfill our potential because an authentic ideal leads us to a mature and meaningful life.
- C. It is attainable. It is possible to reach.
- D. It is motivating. It empowers us to overcome obstacles to meet its criteria.

IX. THE INFLUENCE OF THE IDEAL ON LIFE

- A. An authentic ideal.
 - 1. Gives purpose and meaning to life.
 - 2. Causes a person to rise above self.
 - 3. Develops people who are vital, hopeful, realistic, unselfish, masters of their own lives, and in love with life.
 - 4. Gives direction to life, causing people to do things not by instinct, but through conviction.
- B. A false ideal.
 - 1. Discourages and disheartens.
 - 2. Prevents people from trying a new, and perhaps authentic, ideal.

X. KINDS OF IDEALS

- A. By subject: personal, family, collective, national, universal.

- B. By goals: wealth, academic achievement, glory, fame, honor, prestige, peace, beauty, justice, happiness, perfection, art, family, sports, fun.

It is important to know the difference between:

- C. An apparent ideal: one we like to believe motivates us.
 D. A real ideal: the one that, in fact, motivates us.

XI. THE NECESSITY OF KNOWING OUR IDEAL

What is my ideal? What is your ideal? Is it a real ideal or an apparent ideal?

- A. It is important to know your ideal in life.

An ideal is like the main mast on a sailboat. It holds up your life as a sail before the wind, supported by the keel of your personality.

- B. To discover your ideal, I am going to ask you some questions:

1. What do you think about most?
2. How do you spend your free time?
3. How do you spend your extra money?

The answer to these questions reveals your ideal!

CLARIFICATION OF THE IDEAL OUTLINE

I. Introduction

We are being given the opportunity right now to stop and look beyond the routine of our daily lives. Let's take advantage of this time to think for a moment about the meaning and direction of our lives, about our very existence. We have a very important matter at stake; nothing should concern us more or be more important.

An artist moves away from the painting to get a complete view and to see if it needs any correcting or perfecting or if something needs to be emphasized. In the same way, this weekend we removed ourselves from our daily routine in order to ask ourselves some questions: Who am I? What am I doing with my life? Where is my life going? This is the perfect time to stop to consider the meaning and purpose of my life.

II. Humans as Superior Beings

We begin by looking at our place in the natural order of the world and at the characteristics that make us different from other living things. We are to respect all of creation, as everything in this world is inter-related.

- A. We recall from our school days that there are three natural kingdoms.
1. Mineral. Minerals are lifeless. They are not born; they do not grow; they do not reproduce or die. Examples are rock, sand, water, etc.
 2. Plants. Plants are living things. They have a reproductive process; they develop, reproduce and die. However, once a plant begins growing, it cannot move itself from that place.
 3. Animal. There are two categories:
 - a. Irrational animals not only have life, but have active movement from place to place; they have senses and instinct. In certain species, these senses are more acute and more developed than in humans. What they lack is the ability to think abstractly. Examples are fish, birds, and

- mammals.
- b. Humans are superior to other created things because of their ability to live in a world of ideas.
- B. People are different from other living things. They possess the attributes of intellect, will and freedom.
 1. Intellect is the ability to think, to understand concepts and to seek the truth.
 2. Freedom is the ability to choose between one thing or course of action and another; the ability to have a preference for one idea over another and the ability to make decisions based on the information they have available to them.
 3. Will. The ability to act or not to act; the ability to pursue something the person desires.

III. The Consequences of Being Human

The next few sections are meant to lead the participants to a desire to fulfill their potential. While it is tempting to use scripture for this section, the talk is not to be outwardly religious.

Human superiority as rational beings does have consequences.

- A. Animals are limited to their lives and the circumstances that condition them, such as instincts and habits. People can go beyond these conditions, beyond their own lives.
- B. Life cannot be a goal in itself for people. We shape and direct our lives through the decisions we make; a human being is always developing and becoming.
- C. We are each responsible for developing our potential and must face the consequences of our actions--those we anticipate and those we do not. We are not forced to grow, but can let ourselves stop growing and become stunted or twisted.
- D. At the same time, there is a danger that the same capabilities that make us superior to all other created things and give us our individual identity may jeopardize our humanity. If we do not use, do not develop, or misdirect our potential, we may jeopardize our humanity. Only a human can do this. We can choose to stop our progress in an area and to move in an area that may be less than fully human. This dehumanization may lead us, by excess or default to:
 1. Materialism. In the Western world the drive for material goods is excessive. We often become absorbed in acquiring and possessing the newest, biggest and best and most of whatever there is to be acquired or owned, causing us to ignore other important parts of life.
 2. Spiritualism. On the other hand, shunning all parts of our material nature causes us to ignore our neighbors and hide ourselves away in intellectual and spiritual isolationism. In doing so we fail to hear our neighbor's call for help and their desire for true friendship with us. People can become so absorbed in purely spiritual matters that they disengage themselves from the needs of the world and do not respond to those around them.
 3. Intellectualism. Sometimes people pursue things that are detached from reality. They tend to immerse themselves in intellectual concepts and ideas that relate to life only in theory but have no practical application. If people

develop only this side of themselves and ignore others, they become uncaring and avoid their responsibility to society. If only the intellect is developed, then they fail to see people and become lost in concepts and ideas.

Give brief examples.

- E. People must learn to balance their lives. It is in this balance of the emotional, intellectual and spiritual parts of life that people become fully human -- fully what they were created to be.

People who balance the development of their emotional, intellectual and spiritual life will develop their potential and will reach out to relationships with others. This balance allows them to become more fully human.

It is important to note here that there are individuals with disabilities, some more severe than others. They are limited in their ability to develop in certain areas. These people are not less than human. We are each called to develop in proportion to the ability that we were given at birth.

IV. Being Human -- the Possibilities and Limitations

This section is straightforward and reaches into the feelings of each person. It does not require much expansion, and simple examples should clarify the points. It will be dealt with again later, but now is the time to stir up feelings of restlessness to begin the process of opening the participant's minds to new and greater ideas. The talk concentrates on one of the great mysteries of life: people are complete only when they give of themselves; they are most unhappy when they are concerned only about themselves. Throughout the history of the world, people have made progress in certain areas: science, medicine, industrial production, food production, etc. In spite of this, people are not satisfied. Evil, sorrow, injustice, unhappiness and death are still with us. We need only to read or listen to the daily news to confirm this.

- A. People have a desire to be happy and self-fulfilled. We find that we are constantly seeking to satisfy these desires in spite of the limitations imposed on us by our humanness. People continue to dream of better things. In spite of the rampant materialism in our culture, people find that material things do not satisfy for very long. Once they are acquired, people only desire more.
- B. Each of us has an overpowering drive for happiness and self-fulfillment. This drive causes us to look for things that we hope will satisfy these desires. We dream big dreams but are caught in the web of our limitations. All people are limited in their human capabilities and physical surroundings. Despite all our efforts, there is only so much we can do, and so much we can accomplish. Life is restricted by time and circumstances that will always prevent us from achieving all that we could. As long as we allow ourselves to be limited by our physical and/or mental capabilities, we will find ourselves frustrated and continually unsatisfied.
- C. We are a very self-centered culture. The most unhappy and least fulfilled people are those who turn inward, think only about their own desires and their own importance, ignore others and look only for their own happiness. In other words, when we put ourselves at the center of our lives, we are the most unhappy and unfulfilled. This is the biggest obstacle for becoming fully human.

- D. Each person is born with innate talents and potential. However, most of us tap only a small part of that potential. Limitations can become a motivating power, but most of us fail to see the potential of what we could do if we were motivated enough. A "don't get involved" attitude causes many of us to sit back and let opportunities pass us by. There are many examples of what people have overcome: Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf, but learned to read, write and talk, for instance. Our own attitudes, perhaps including self-pity or helplessness, cause us to sit back and let opportunities pass us by.
- E. Potential is best realized by setting goals and pursuing them. This is the deciding factor in whether or not we realize our full potential. If we do not do this, we drift aimlessly throughout life without goals or direction, and we will not realize our potential. Setting goals helps us discover and put our talents to use as we work toward reaching our goals.
- F. Limiting our potential creates frustration and restlessness within us. When we do not take advantage of our talents and develop our potential, we are unfulfilled. Too often we hear of gifted people whose lives are stifled and sometimes devastated because of their inability to achieve their potential.

We have all heard uplifting stories of individuals who used what talents and gifts they had, in spite of physical or mental limitations, to attain their goals against overwhelming odds. Give an example of someone who discovered a need and rose up to meet it. People discover their possibilities only by testing the limits of their own conception of themselves. Only a worthwhile goal can give people the powerful force that drives their lives.

V. SELF-GIVING IS THE MEASURE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

This section completes the description of a mature person from the viewpoint of psychological theory. The ability of people to give of themselves is seen as the ultimate in human freedom and in living a fulfilling life.

- A. All expressions of people's actions are tied up in the longing to be happy, whether conscious or unconscious. Everything they do satisfies a need. Only when they desire to meet needs outside of themselves, do they begin to meet their potential. True happiness comes only when they give of themselves totally for another person in order to reach a goal. This is the paradox of humanity. This is the highest level of human development.
- B. It is only when we turn to needs and causes outside ourselves that we challenge our full potential. As we challenge our abilities, we often discover that we are able to do more than we ever imagined that we could do, especially when we give ourselves to the cause totally.
- C. Self-giving is the measure of human development. Where or to what a person gives of him/herself defines the degree of the person's human development. Where a person directs his/her self-giving illustrates where the person's life is focused.

This giving of self can be directed toward:

1. Self. One focuses on him/herself to be the best s/he can be. All one's energy is directed toward reaching that goal. An example may be a musician or artist who strives to perfect his/her talent or an athlete hoping to compete in

- the Olympics.
2. Objects. Here the individual directs all of his/her energies, gifts and talents to the accomplishment of a project or program. For example, constructing a building or creating a new business.
 3. Ideas. This means striving to bring alive or realize a certain cause. It may be using our potential and talents to make the world a better place to live. For example, Jonas Salk spent many years developing the polio vaccine.
 4. Other people. When a person gives him/herself to other people, s/he uses his/her gifts and talents to help others: helping the sick, the elderly, the homeless, the lonely and the confused. S/he puts the needs of the other person or the injustice they suffer ahead of his/her own needs.
- D. It is the focus of a person's life that limits or expands the meaning of his/her life. It is only love turned outward (self-giving) that has the capacity to propel us toward our potential. It is life turned inward that can sink us into the quagmire of self-pity, hatred and destruction.

VI. THE PROCESS OF BEING FULLY HUMAN

The development of the concept of an ideal flows from the previous section's stress on the need to give of oneself. This section sets the stage for the remainder of the weekend. All the rest of the talks discuss the ideal, the perfect goal, and help the participants become truly committed to that goal. Here we are opening up the participant to the need to develop a plan based on an ideal.

- A. Mature people learn that they can master their inner selves and their actions. Whether they give or hold back is up to them. Nothing or no one else can make them do this. People may lose their possessions or physical abilities, but this does not destroy or control who they are. The next step enables them to move ahead. Unless they are willing to give of themselves, they are not free. Freedom is to give--not to exist for themselves but for others. What a paradox; what a joy! Once people give themselves away, they discover that they are not controlled but have command of themselves.
- B. Becoming fully human is a process. It involves the following steps:
 1. Choose a goal. The goal must be worthwhile. It is not a goal if it has no real meaning.
 2. The goal and its criteria become an inner conviction. It must be something that compels us to act in a certain way.
 3. Make the goal attractive and feasible so it fills our aspirations.
 4. These aspirations will guide and rule the criteria for our actions. Each step we take in reaching our goal must be guided by what we believe is most worthwhile.
 5. Achieving the goal becomes a way of life. It encompasses all that we do, all that we are and all that we wish to become. We live, drink and eat to achieve the goal. The goal transforms people as long as they pursue it.
- C. Every person has a goal in life whether they are conscious of it or not. This goal governs the way they live. We need to see the goal clearly and move to achieve it. We call the goal each person is struggling to reach an ideal.

You may wish to give an example of a person whose goal led him/her to a way of life. This could be yourself, a person you know or a famous person known to the participants.

VII. What Is an Ideal?

- A. If we are going to move toward achieving our ideal, we must understand what it means. An ideal is the center of our goals. Many people find it difficult to understand the meaning of the word "ideal" in Via de Cristo. This is because it is common to talk about a person's many ideals. Via de Cristo, however, talks of a single ideal. Each person has only one ideal. S/he may have a number of goals or objectives, but only one ideal. The ideal is the combination of the goals, dreams and objectives. The goals of a person are the components of the ideal. It sums up happiness for the person. It is the axis of the person's life. In other words, the person's life, happiness, meaning, etc. revolve around this ideal.

Another way of looking at the Via de Cristo concept of an ideal is that each person is heading toward something. By the way people live their lives, they develop into certain kinds of people. A person's ideal is the unified combination of his/her goals and the image of what s/he wants to become.

Many people's goals are not very well unified in their minds. There are a number of incompatible elements in their thoughts that do not add up to one coherent idea. For the purpose of this talk, it is not necessary to consider this.

When conflicts arise, people make choices, and the choices will indicate what their ideal really is. This is not the place to point out to the participants that their goals may not be very well unified in their minds. What they should feel at this point in the talk is that the combination of their goals adds up to something: an ideal. They actually do have an ideal, and it is this ideal that determines the kind of person they are. This concept will give them a means for determining what is the most influential combination of goals in their lives. Part of the force of the conclusion of this talk comes from the uneasiness that the participants have developed by the end of this section -- their goals add up to an ideal, and there is a combination of goals that says what kind of person they will be.

- B. There are two parts to an ideal. Both must be considered in determining the ideal. The ideal is more than a simple sum of the goals and objectives; the ideal is affected by the relative motivation of each goal or objective. This is the key to the final section of this talk. It also has an important bearing on the Study and Evangelization of Environments talk on Sunday.
1. Vision. Vision is the combination of ideas, aspirations and preferences in life. It is static or fixed. It provides the framework, structure and understanding of the ideal. It is important that the ideal is made up of ideas. An ideal is determined by our preferences and choices. It orders and coordinates them.

Part of the purpose of the Ideal talk is to stress the need for the participants to become conscious of the way they are living their lives. They should begin by becoming aware of what is guiding them. The ideal should be thought about and discussed. Of course, not every person's ideal is fully conscious. Usually it is semi-conscious. One of the purposes of the talk,

then, is to get the participants started on the process of bringing their ideal to full consciousness, the process of really discovering what they are like.

2. Motivation. Motivation is the force or power that moves us toward the vision. It empowers us to act out our vision. We could say that motivation is our desire or effort to consciously pursue our ideal.

It is also important to understand that the ideas in an ideal represent values. Part of being human is moving toward something. It is not until the participants become aware that they are moving toward various values that they begin to ask the question: "What is really worth it?"

Without vision we cannot have an idea of the ideal; without the motivating element, the ideal is nothing but an illusion.

- C. A person's life ebbs and flows according to his/her ideal. As we experience the ebbs and flows of life, our ideals change.
- D. Ideals in life change. They are different in childhood, youth and maturity. A child's ideal may involve things as games, toys, going to Sunday School, etc. As s/he grows, ideals may involve sports, school and friends. A young adult's ideal may involve plans for the future, amusements and love. An adult may have an ideal that involves money, family, honor and ambition. As a person grows older, ideals change and develop, but one always has an ideal.
- E. Since all people have goals, then, there is no human life without an ideal. The ideal shapes and characterizes a person's whole life. Our progress through life has characteristics that make us unique individuals. "Tell me what your ideal is, and I will tell you what you are like." Every person has an ideal -- something that drives his/her life.

Our ideal changes us. It makes us what we are. An ideal is not external possessions. It determines what we are like. It marks us.

This section begins the second phase of the talk. The first six sections should have given the listener a feeling of what a mature human being is. This section and the next clarify the term "ideal." The talk changes from a general discussion of human beings and starts to hit closer to home by becoming more personal in two ways. First, it underlines the fact that every person has an ideal (and therefore every participant has an ideal and cannot say that the talk is not about him/her unless s/he wants to admit that s/he is less than human). Second, it says that the kind of ideal one has shows what kind of person s/he is (and therefore, it is worthwhile for each person to know what kind of ideal one has if one cares what kind of person s/he is.) This section does not explicitly challenge the participants to think about their ideals (that happens at the conclusion), but if the talk is well presented, each participant will start thinking about his/her own ideal at least by this section.

VIII. Qualities of an Authentic Ideal

Our lives become a reflection of our ideal. Because of this, it is important that our ideal be authentic, that is, one capable of satisfying our every need. It must also be attainable. These two attributes summarize the seemingly impossible task when describing how people can reach their potential. The perfect ideal moves a person into an ever-growing awareness of life and its meaning. It captivates us and overwhelms us with its meaning so that we can let ourselves become one with it. The authentic ideal will

never disappoint a person. It always offers more, and yet it is attainable.

An authentic ideal has four qualities:

- A. It is vital. It must provide great meaning and constantly move a person into an ever-growing awareness of life in its fullness.
- B. It is complete. We are able to live our whole life for this ideal because it leads us to maturity.
 1. It contains definable goals at a level that are understandable to the person. It does no good to have a beautiful-sounding ideal whose results seem magnificent, but whose long and short-term goals are vague and unclear. The result will be frustration, discouragement and a loss of motivation and conviction.
 2. It will fulfill our present and future needs.
 3. It must inspire us to reach out and give of ourselves.
 4. It challenges us to strive to fulfill our potential. We want to live our whole life for this ideal because it leads us to a more mature and meaningful life.
- C. It is attainable. It is something that is possible for the person to accomplish within a reasonable time period. This prevents becoming disappointed, disillusioned and discouraged. If the ideal is not attainable, we are wasting our gifts and talents and do not fulfill our potential. It is always able to present new goals requiring us to exert ourselves further in order to complete them.
- D. It motivates us to be faithful and overcome obstacles to reaching the ideal. An authentic ideal should motivate us by giving us the strength and courage to continue to move forward regardless of conflicts, lack of time or energy, frustration or other obstacles we may face in our life's journey. An ideal urges people to give a little more of themselves to reach the goal because the results are worth it. The goals will help people grow while inspiring, encouraging and fulfilling all of their needs. Thus, the authentic ideal will satisfy the seeming paradox for achieving true happiness.

Idealists often have a bad reputation. They often try for things that seemingly cannot be reached. When people have enough unpleasant experiences trying for unattainable ideals, they may reach the point of souring on all ideals. Therefore, it is vital that the ideal be attainable or within the grasp of each individual. We leave this section without answering the obvious question: "What constitutes the authentic ideal?" That is the subject for the next talk. For now, we wish to make the participants aware of the possibility that there is such an authentic ideal. The possibility arises because we have outlined its qualities and aroused their curiosity.

Give an example of someone who set goals and ideals that became an authentic ideal. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Bill Gates, Mother Theresa, Susan B. Anthony are possible examples of people whose lives revolved around his/her ideal. You may also give a personal example or use an example of someone you know.

IX. The Influence of the Ideal on Life

This section shows what an ideal can do for a person. A good ideal can make life worth living and give it direction and purpose. A good ideal can help a person overcome difficulties and their own limitations, helping them achieve something greater than they could before, perhaps even something they thought was impossible.

This section is meant to stimulate the participants to examine what kind of ideal they have. People do not live just for themselves. They can have an ideal for themselves, for their family, for any group to which they belong, for their nation or for the world. Participants should be stirred to think about what they are really working on in all areas of their lives. They can live for something greater than themselves -- even reach the point of sacrificing themselves for something greater than themselves. A person's ideal is potentially more important than life itself. Things that are especially worthwhile in human history are due to an ideal that people have held and lived for.

Ideals can be characterized in a number of ways:

A. Authentic ideal.

1. An authentic ideal makes life worth living and gives direction and purpose to life. It opens the possibility of achieving our full human potential. It provides motivation, enabling a person to achieve that total immersion of self-giving described as the ultimate human response in section VI.
2. An authentic ideal helps people rise above self and overcome difficulties they face. They are better able to overcome personal human limitations and fears that hold them back and to achieve something greater than they could before. Only with such an ideal can people overcome the inner fears and tensions that hold them back. People are not capable of making that step of ultimate surrender unless they sense, deep within themselves, an equal response from the one to which they have given themselves.
3. The authentic ideal has the power to captivate a person, to lead them to be faithful to the goals that support the ideal. A person will never tire of it nor ever exhaust its depth. It is gentle and comforting, always giving hope and joy to combat the often-crushing realities of life. It seems easy because they are doing things that are within their abilities and are developing their talents and gifts to the fullest. It brings them joy. They are doing something into which they can put all of their energy. They feel useful. They are unselfish because they want to share and enhance the lives of others.
4. People are not just automatically reacting with their instinct but with the conviction that what they are doing is worthwhile and purposeful. They are the masters of their own lives and are in love with life. Life now has a meaningful purpose. People are living for something greater than themselves, perhaps reaching the point of sacrificing themselves for something greater than themselves. A person's ideal is potentially more important than life itself.

B. False Ideal

1. A false ideal discourages and disheartens. It is soul wrenching to discover that the ideal is empty and made of clay. Such a misguided move often so discourages a person that they retreat and may never try again. Whether it is a misguided love affair, a misplaced trust or an empty or incomplete cause, a person can be so destroyed that it makes future self-giving very difficult. This is why the prudent person should judge very carefully what the ideal is before making a true commitment. A false ideal does not call a person to develop the talents and gifts s/he has. It is not greater than the person, and it does not inspire the person to wholeheartedly support it.

2. A false ideal prevents a person from trying to achieve something new or different, perhaps an authentic ideal. Giving oneself to a false ideal, one that is hollow or undefined can prevent the person from seeking something that will truly motivate and inspire him/her. To never give of oneself, to never risk, leaves a person stunted and prevents him/her from exploring other possibilities in life.

Therefore, a person should carefully evaluate his/her choice of an ideal and then commit him/herself to that ideal, for this is the only key to his/her true self.

X. Kinds of Ideals

This section goes a step further. It sketches various ideals to stimulate the participant to examine what kind of ideal s/he has.

There are several categories of ideals:

- A. By subject: These include personal, family, collective, national, or universal ideals.
- B. By goals: If a person seeks one set of goals, the ideal will be different from the ideal of someone with different goals. A personal goal might be competing in the Olympics or making a lot of money. A goal for a football team might be winning a league championship. The person will live his/her life to meet the goal.

Give examples to clarify the meaning of this section. The participants must be able to relate to the examples.

It is important to know the difference between:

- C. An apparent ideal: one we want to believe motivates us, the one we would like to believe we hold. Many people tell themselves and others that their ideal is some laudable goal, but their lives show something very different. The speaker must help the participants see that perhaps the goals they say they have may not be the goals they live. This primes them for the concluding questions of the talk and gives them something to ponder before being asked to look carefully at themselves.
- D. The real ideal is the one that does, in fact, motivate us. A person may say that s/he is concerned for the homeless or those of a particular ethnic origin or particular region and may donate time and money to this praiseworthy idea. There may be, however, in his/her concern for others, a self-fulfilling ideal to earn prestige and recognition in the community. The person's real ideal, therefore, is building up his/her own prestige and power in the community. The concern for the homeless and less fortunate is only an apparent ideal.

XI. The Necessity of Knowing Our Ideal

This section concludes the talk by leading the participants to a serious self-examination.

- A. It is important to know your ideal. Without a clear knowledge and understanding of your ideal, you may subject yourself to an aimless, frustrating and discouraging existence.

A comparison can be made between the structure and course of a sailboat

and the whole person and the course of his/her life. The main mast of a sailboat holds the sails that enable the keel, the main frame of the boat, to move forward. Without the mast, the boat would drift aimlessly and be at the mercy of the elements. The mast also has to be fitted to the keel. If it is too large for the keel, it will swamp the boat. If it is too small, it will not be adequate for the boat, and it will not function as well as it could. The mast is fitted to the keel to insure that it will be steady and secure. Similarly, our mast is our ideal. Without a clear perception of our ideal, we would drift aimlessly through life at the mercy of all that surrounds us. Our ideal must be fitted to our life to provide stability and security.

Two things that determine what our life will be like are our personality (what we are) and our ideal (what we are trying to become). These things support and give direction to our whole life.

B. Discovering your ideal.

To discover your ideal, simply observe where your thoughts, your free time, your money and your energy go. There is your ideal. I am now asking you to consider: what is your ideal? To help you arrive at a complete answer, I leave you with the following questions to ask yourself:

1. What do you think about most?
2. Where do you spend your free time?
3. How do you spend your extra money?

In the answers to these questions you will discover your ideal!