

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING A TALK AND USING THE TALK OUTLINES

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

You received a call to be on a team, asked for discernment, and concluded that the Lord was calling you to serve at this time. There is a reason God wanted you on this particular team in the role you have been assigned. Serve Him with prayerful anticipation.

You were asked to give a talk. You may be eager to do so and/or very uncertain about it. Whether or not you feel capable of giving a talk is not relevant at this point. Many people before you have had those same feelings, probably even someone who gave a talk at the weekend you attended. In the Leaders talk, we are reminded that we are all leaders. We just need to rely on God to guide us and to develop the qualities in us that are necessary for the task. It is the same for giving a talk. For many people, this is a growing experience and they must trust God to work through them. What is more important than feeling capable of giving a talk is that you are living the Via de Cristo method. Are you growing in your relationship with God? Are you reaching out to others with God's love? Do you have the support of a Group Reunion and an Ultreya? Are you living the life that you will be presenting in your talk?

Once you have said "yes" to writing a talk, pray for wisdom and guidance. Read all of the material for your talk and be familiar with the progression of the weekend before you begin. The progression of the weekend has been carefully planned, even if we were unaware of this on our own weekend. The talks on the weekend are not simply fifteen talks, but fifteen sections of one talk. Think of your talk as a chapter in a book. Each talk, like the chapter of a book, says the things that must be presented at that time. There is a natural progression. The author has carefully thought through the presentation of the material or the plot of the story. The whole would not make sense if one chapter was omitted or strayed from the purpose of the book. In the same way, if you go off on your own tangent, give inappropriate examples, give a stirring witness too early in the weekend or omit things that are important to the progression of the weekend, your talk will not fit into the overall plan of the weekend. Make every point in the outline and add none of your own. Your choice of words and your personal examples and/or witness will make your talk unique.

Another way to think of the talks is to imagine building a tower of blocks. Each block must be firm and whole to build a solid foundation. If a talk does not include all the points, it does not give the solid foundation that the subsequent talks need to build on. It is also deficient if it presents examples or a witness that do not fit the points of the talk. Time will have been spent on unnecessary material, which weakens the talk and interferes with the progression of the weekend. A stirring witness, no matter how touching, will obscure the message of the talk if it does not clarify a point of the outline and fit into the progression of the weekend. Examples should be brief, with only enough detail to make the point.

Giving a talk on a Via de Cristo weekend takes a special kind of discipline and humility. The talks build gradually from Friday morning to Sunday afternoon. Each one is meant to do a certain job in a certain way. It is important to present the material that is unique to that talk because the remaining talks build on it. You may use your own creative writing and personal speaking style, while still making the points of your

particular talk. The talks should catch and retain the attention of the participants and fit into the purpose of the talk in the progression of the weekend. They should not sound “canned”. It is customary to write out your talk. It will keep your talk concise, avoid rambling, and stay within your time limit. Once it has been critiqued at a team meeting, your talk should not be changed without the consent of the rector/a.

If you are asked to give a talk for the second time, do not use your old talk. Each talk should be written for a particular weekend. In the time that elapsed, you have grown in your relationship with God and in your understanding of the Via de Cristo method. You may now have an example or a witness that is more current and more relevant. If it is fresh for you, the participants will respond to that.

It is important to use inclusive language. If it is a men’s or women’s weekend, use the appropriate gender pronouns in your talk. There are a few secretariats that sponsor co-ed weekends. Be sensitive to use of gender if you are giving a talk on one of these weekends. It is also important to be aware that there are participants who are married, single, divorced or widowed. Differences in national origin, race and age should also be considered when choosing examples and witnesses.

Each talk, in its own way, should do two things. First, it explains a part of the picture or method. Second, it urges and/or inspires the participants to do what is presented and shows that it is possible. Each talk does this in its own way. Be sensitive to the progression of the weekend. The opening talks explain Christianity more generally and the participants are encouraged to develop and deepen a relationship with God. The final talks lay out a concrete method of sharing our faith in the world. Each one progresses, with definite steps, to inspire the participants into action. The later talks are to be given with more enthusiasm, including examples of how the Via de Cristo method of renewal has worked in their own lives.

There is also a development of several minor topics. These ideas do not have a talk assigned to them, but are developed gradually in several talks. For instance, lay-clergy relations are discussed in three talks: Layperson as Church in the World, Means of Grace (or Days in the Life or Sacraments) and Developing Christian Community Within Our Environments, each time in a different way. Spiritual direction is mentioned in several talks. The same is true of prayer, family life and the Church.

By making the Christian ideal seem attractive and attainable, the talks should evoke a desire in the participants to respond to God’s love by developing or deepening their relationship with Him and by instilling in them a desire to share God’s love with others. To do this they need the support of the Christian community. As the talks unfold, the participants will gradually see a vision develop and will stay interested until the end of the last day.

It is good to be aware of the different responses possible during the weekend. For introverts the silent retreat may be welcome and allow them to go within. For others, it is frustrating to be with all these people and not be able to talk to them; they are more comfortable if they can talk with and connect to other people. Later in the weekend, the extraverts will be energized and the introverts may feel overwhelmed with too much togetherness and little or no time to process what they are hearing.

II. PROGRESSION OF THE WEEKEND

THURSDAY

The first meditation Thursday night suggests that the participant “Know Yourself”. The second meditation, “The Prodigal Son”, reminds us that we, like the prodigal son, have often strayed away from our heavenly Father. God joyfully welcomes us home when we stray from Him, just as the father welcomed his son. When he was a long way off, his father ran to him joyfully. In the same way, our Father is waiting for us to come to Him. The spiritual retreat follows. It prepares the participants for the weekend by making them more aware of Christ’s presence and by emphasizing the need to come to Him.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE VIA DE CRISTO WEEKEND

On Friday the intention is to bring the participants face to face with themselves. They grapple with the question, “Who am I?” The speakers present a new set of values and ideas about life, higher and more spiritual values than they may have had before. The purpose of the morning meditation, “The Three Glances of Christ”, is to make the participants aware of the need to respond to God. They are given examples from the gospels of three persons on whom Christ directed His gaze. Each person will react differently, asking him/herself the question, “How will I respond?”

The five talks on the first day clearly present the ideal of living the life of grace. The following are the important points of each talk:

IDEAL (The Call to be Fully Human)

- 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 examining what you think about and how you spend your extra time and money.

GRACE (HABITUAL GRACE)

- God’s supreme ideal is that all of His children live in His grace and love.
- We are invited to a new relationship with God because of God’s habitual grace.
- We can respond to God’s invitation.
- Grace, a natural attribute of God, calls us to be part of the family of God.
- We are members of the family of our Father, living as brothers and sisters, with Christ as our brother.
- Grace is not based on our worthiness, but solely on God’s divine nature.

THE LAYPERSON AS THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

- Christ did not intend merely to save individuals but to save the world. For this reason He founded the Church to continue His mission to the world.
- As members of the Church, the laity have a specific mission to the world and in the world to be fully Christian.
- Because responding to God’s love changes our lives, we are called to penetrate

and transform society through the power of the Gospel.

ACTUAL GRACE

- Humans feel inadequate to participate in God's mission, but God has not left us alone.
- God offers us His grace and enables us to accept it and grow in faith.
- The Holy Spirit lives and works in us, enlightening our mind and inspiring our will.
- As the body of Christ, we are in this together.
- Palanca is the spiritual "lever" of prayer and sacrifice on the weekend and in our ministry.

At this point general palanca is introduced and the low-key approach ends.

PIETY

- Piety arises out of our relationship with God.
- There are many types of false piety.
- Authentic piety is directing our whole life to God.
- We need to nourish our relationship with God through practices of authentic piety.
- Piety is a life-long process.

THE SECOND DAY OF THE VIA DE CRISTO WEEKEND

By the beginning of the second day, the participants begin to ask themselves: How can I attain this ideal of a conscious and growing life in Christ and how can I become an authentic, dynamic Christian? The talks on this day are geared to answer these questions by presenting a Christ-oriented sacramental piety that makes us more fully aware of being the people of God, the body of Christ. The participants are introduced to prayer as a personal conversation with their brother Jesus. They begin to feel a concern for their brothers and sisters in Christ. The second day begins with the meditation, "The Figure of Christ." The emphasis is on the humanity of Christ, the Christ who is living today, the Person who attracts so many to Him. The participants are invited into a personal, intimate friendship with Jesus.

STUDY

- Christian study is not the same as the study of Christianity.
- The principle source of study is the Bible.
- Everyone studies throughout life.
- There are obstacles to study.
- There are remedies to overcome these obstacles.

MEANS OF GRACE (A DAY IN THE LIFE, OR CHANNELS OF GRACE)

- We encounter Christ throughout life. He personally touches us.
- This enables us to lead fully Christian lives, sharing God's grace with others.
- Sacraments as means of grace.
- Baptism

- Holy Communion (Eucharist)
- Other events in our lives become grace-filled days in the life of a Christian.

APOSTOLIC ACTION

- Apostolic action naturally follows piety and study.
- Apostolic action is anything we do with the sole purpose of sharing Christ with others and desiring that they have a relationship with Him.
- Apostolic action is non-manipulative.
- Apostolic action's purpose is to infuse Christ's ideal into the world.
- Friendship is the key to sharing Christ with others.

OBSTACLES TO GRACE

- Sin is a reality, a failure to live as we should.
- Obstacles are sin, Satan, the world and our own flesh.
- Obstacles in the attitudes of our hearts and minds frustrate our growth in grace.
- There are influences in our society that encourage us to sin.
- Obstacles are tests of our love and reminders to love God and others more.
- Prayer, spiritual direction and Christian friendship are among the remedies for overcoming these obstacles.

LEADERS

- Each person is a leader in his/her personal environments.
- Natural and supernatural qualities of leaders can be developed through enhancing loving characteristics.
- Transforming the world depends on each individual Christian.
- Each individual is responsible to offer all of his/her individual talents in service to God in his/her natural environments.
- The group is more than the sum of its individual members when influencing an environment for God.

THE THIRD DAY OF THE VIA DE CRISTO WEEKEND

By the beginning of the third day, most of the participants are beginning to feel renewed, committed, and filled with enthusiasm. On the first day they encountered themselves. On the second day they entered into intimate friendship with Christ. Today their thoughts are projected out into the world. They are told how they can share Christ with others in the world in which they live. The third day is a call to apostolic action. The day begins with the meditation, "Christ's Message to the Participant." The participants hear that Christ is counting on them: "I have chosen you and have appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit."

THE STUDY AND EVANGELIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- Christianity is lived in community.
- We need to study our environments in order to change them.
- God gives us what we need to evangelize our environments--to make them more

Christ-like.

- This is accomplished by working with others who share our mission.

LIFE IN GRACE (CHRISTIAN LIFE)

- The practices of piety provide a practical program for spiritual growth.
- The Piety section of the reunion card is explained, including spiritual direction and the importance of prayer.
- Our practices of piety will change and deepen as we grow spiritually.

DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WITHIN OUR ENVIRONMENTS

- Our mission is to transform our environments into living Christian communities.
- We are to form Christian communities in our environments.
- The purpose of Christian community is the evangelization of the world.
- God gives the community what it needs to accomplish this goal.

GROUP REUNION AND ULTREYA

- 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, the reunion of groups, includes a broader spectrum of the Christian community to support our mission.
- Without Ultreya it is harder for a group reunion to reach its purpose of sharing Christ with the world.

FOURTH DAY

- We each have a responsibility to carry out the mission entrusted to us.
- It is not easy, but the Via de Cristo method helps us persevere.
- Christ is the cornerstone and source of our ability to persevere.
- Each person's call to apostolic action is unique.
- Life is living the Via de Cristo.

III. PROGRESSION OF EXAMPLES AND WITNESS IN THE TALKS.

This is an overview of how to use examples and witness in the talks. A more in-depth discussion is included in the specific talk outlines under the heading "Suggestions for Writing This Talk."

THURSDAY

Thursday evening the participants are usually nervous and uncertain. They know no one or just a few people in the group that has gathered. Although the team tries to make them feel at ease, the unknown brings with it a certain amount of anxiety even for the most confident participants. The team, on the other hand, is excited and eager. Being

sensitive to the participants and their feelings of anxiety are important. Keep the progression of the weekend in mind.

FRIDAY

The first day presents the life in grace as the fundamental ideal of Christian life. The most common mistake is saying too much. The talks are low-key and do not use the actual experiences of the speaker in the same way that later talks do. The talks should be clear, natural and presented with conviction. The participants are told clearly what a great thing s/he is called to do and urged to do it. The use of illustrations and examples is carefully controlled.

IDEAL

The first talk is difficult to prepare, and for this reason it should be assigned to an experienced team member. It is very matter-of-fact in presenting the material. There is no prayer, no mention of God or any use of scripture, no matter how tempting it is to slip it in. The first three meditations, two on Thursday evening and one Friday morning, have challenged the participants to look at their relationship with God. Without saying it directly in the talk, many participants will already be thinking that a life with God should be his/her ideal. All examples should be short, to the point and not religious in nature. It is essential that this talk remains secular and does not deviate from its purpose.

ACTUAL GRACE

Given by clergy, this talk presents the life in grace as the Christian ideal. It, and all the talks that follow, begin with prayer. The use of scripture is introduced.

LAYPERSON AS CHURCH IN THE WORLD

This talk remains low-key. Examples are not stirring testimonies, but concrete examples of the Church active in the world. Scripture is used in this talk.

ACTUAL GRACE

This talk ends with the presentation of general palanca and the low-key approach ends.

PIETY

The Piety talk presents the example of a person who is living the life of grace. It includes how the speaker came to realize what directing one's life to God means and the difference this has made in his/her life. Being the first talk with a personal testimony, Piety often has a significant impact on the participants. It must be presented with conviction and enthusiasm. The participants see that it is possible to live a life dedicated to God because the speaker presents a life that has done this successfully.

SATURDAY

While echoing the message of Friday, the second day talks patiently explain how it is done--what each person must do to live the Christian ideal and become a leader for Christ. Each talk presents the participant with one part of the process. Each talk is

explanatory in nature and explains how the method works. The speaker needs to be aware of not saying too much. Examples are primarily explanatory and show how the method worked in the life of the speaker. They are not to be inspirational in the way the Sunday talks are. The focus is individual and personal.

STUDY

The Study talk is meant to explain Christian study and why it is important. The examples are explanatory in nature and illustrate the study method that has worked for the speaker in deepening his/her relationship with God and in discerning God's will for his/her life.

MEANS OF GRACE (A DAY IN THE LIFE, CHANNELS OF GRACE)

This talk is given by clergy. It discusses the sacraments--God touching us in everyday things and throughout life.

APOSTOLIC ACTION

The talk presents a method of personal evangelism and shows how it works. Apostolic action is the natural response of a Christian who has experienced God's unconditional love and wants to share it. The witness in the talk is sharing the speaker's response to God's love. S/he introduces his/her friend, Jesus, to a friend. Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring your friend to Christ.

OBSTACLES TO GRACE

Obstacles to Grace is given by clergy. It discusses some of the obstacles we face when trying to live the life of grace. It also presents remedies to these obstacles.

LEADERS

Leaders is the inspirational talk of the day and summarizes the day in a moving way, showing that what has been presented during the day works. The speaker shows what a person can do when living the method that was presented. It includes examples of the natural and supernatural qualities of a leader, a person who is putting all s/he is into being a Christian. In his/her own way, everyone is a leader in his/her environment.

SUNDAY

The third day explains further what it means to be a Christian leader, but does it on a different level. Up to this time the focus has been on the individual. This now changes to focus on the environment in which a person finds him/herself and his/her relationships with others in these environments. The talks stress how the participants must co-operate with other Christians and form Christian community with them. It fills out the vision of how the Church and the individual Christian can function in the modern world. It takes a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ and relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ to give us the support and encouragement we need. This involves the presentation of a method. Each talk presents its part of the method. The participants are given instructions on how the Via de Cristo method works. It also provides a vision of the Church as a Christian community that is accomplishing something. The talks are strong, urgent, confident and triumphant. He is risen! He has

overcome the world! He is present in His Church, still overcoming the world! Examples need to show a Christian community working together to evangelize an environment. The participants should have the feeling that there is such a community, they can fit into it, and they can also be successful in sharing Christ with their world.

THE STUDY AND EVANGELIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

This talk introduces a new concept. Our environments are those groups to which we belong. As Christian leaders we should be having an impact on those environments in order that they become more Christ-like. Eduardo Bonnin, the founder of Cursillo®, thought that this talk presented a concept that most participants had not heard before. The first talk of each day, including this one, is explanatory in nature. It must be clear, systematic, specific and concrete, laying out a method. It presents specific examples of things to think about when planning to influence an environment for Christ and working with individuals in that environment. It gives practical methods that produce positive results.

LIFE IN GRACE (CHRISTIAN LIFE)

This is the final clergy talk. (In some movements it is given by a layperson.) It presents spiritual direction as one method of persevering in the Christian ideal and discusses the Piety section of the reunion card.

DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WITHIN OUR ENVIRONMENTS

The remaking of society can only be accomplished through the building of self-giving Christian communities developed within our environments. The appropriate witness in this talk is the example of an environment being transformed by a group—a practical example and living story of Christians working together to change the spirit of an environment to be more Christ-like. It is to be joyful and inspirational, leading the participants to believe that they can do this too.

GROUP REUNION AND ULTREYA

This talk introduces the Via de Cristo method of persevering. It is the living example of a person who is part of a Group Reunion that supports the deepening of his/her faith and encourages him/her to share Christ with others in order to transform his/her environments. S/he also witnesses to the support of the greater Christian community through Ultreya. “This method works!” is the message of the talk. It is not possible, at best very difficult, to persevere alone. We need the support of our relationship with Christ and our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ to persevere. The witness in the talk shows how this worked in the life of the speaker. As in the previous talk, the emphasis is not how the Christian community supported the speaker through a difficult time, but supported his/her reaching out to others with Jesus’ love and forming Christian community with them. It is inspirational in nature and witnesses about a method that works.

THE FOURTH DAY

This talk emphasizes what has been presented in the previous talks and is another example of someone living the Via de Cristo method by influencing those around him/her

for Christ. It also prepares the participants for some of the common problems they may face when they get home. It is a joyful example of another person who shows by example that it is possible to persevere.

IV. HOW TO USE THE OUTLINES

There are three main sections of each talk outline. The first section is divided into four topics: Orientation, General Comments, Atmosphere and Suggestions for Writing This Talk. The Outline and the Clarification of the Outline follow.

The first section is important to provide the framework of the talk. It discusses the important points of the talk, the atmosphere of the weekend at the point that this talk is given and important suggestions for writing the talk. It talks more specifically about the points in the outline, which ones should be emphasized, appropriate examples and witnesses for the talk and where they should be inserted. It is important background information the speaker needs in order to write an effective talk that fits into the progression of the weekend.

The outline presents the points that must be made in the talk. It is expected that each talk contains these points and no others. Write-downs are underlined in the outline. If a participant writes down only those things, s/he will have a good outline of what was presented on the weekend. For those movements that use overheads, this is the minimum of what should appear on the overheads. There are a few places where the outline clearly says that a specific Bible verse should be included. In some talks there are more Bible verses than can be included and stay within the time frame, or there are several Bible verses that clarify a point being made. Use of Bible verses in those instances is at the discretion of the speaker.

The Clarification of the Outline section is meant to clarify the points made in the outline point by point. It is meant primarily for the enlightenment of the speaker and fleshes out the points in the outline. It expands and explains the thought. Although the speaker may want to use some of these ideas in his/her talk, it is not possible to use all of the Clarification in your talk. Bible verses in the Clarification may be included, but do not need to be used.

It is important to read all three sections of the talk outline before beginning to write a talk. This will help you understand what is to be presented in the talk, how it fits into the progression of the weekend and the atmosphere of the weekend at this point.

Pray first, last, and always. Pray for team formation during team meetings, since building Christian community is the first priority for the meetings. Pray before you begin preparing your talk. Pray as you read the material. Pray as you sit down to write the talk. Pray after the talk is written, asking for discernment whether you have said the things that need to be said. Pray for the people who will critique the talk. Pray for the participants who will hear the talk, that each one would hear what God wants him/her to hear in the talk. There will be prayer support as you give the talk. Pray for the discussion after the talk. Pray for the weekend as a whole. In other words, bathe the weekend and your part in it in prayer. After the weekend, continue to pray for the participants as they return home. Pray for their perseverance in the Via de Cristo method.

To God be the glory!