

# TEXAS GULF COAST VIA DE CRISTO

## TABLE LEADERS MANUAL

### Preface

Like the center of a flower, the table is where the blooming is centered on the weekend. The role of the table leader involves essentially "caring" and "sharing". "Caring" includes active listening:

"Mary sat at the feet of the Lord and listened, and Jesus said, "Mary has chosen the right thing." (Luke 10:41-42)

And "sharing" involves not only planting the seed by the Rollistas and nurturing the seedlings by the table leaders, but also leaving room for the important creative work of God:

"Each one of us does the work the Lord gave us to do; I planted the seed. Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow." (1 Cor. 3:5-6)

Table leaders are the ones who have the most direct contact with the pilgrims during the weekend, the ones who touch and are touched more than anyone else by these seedlings. It is our hope that this manual will help you, as table leaders, in your efforts to care and share and still leave room for the creative "power of God".

### Your Tools

The Via de Cristo method includes:

1. Prayer
2. Study
3. Action

If used in that order, these powerful tools will equip you to serve as a table leader.

## Table Leader Responsibilities

### Preparation

Pray

Pray for your co-table leader.

Pray for the New Pilgrims who will be at your table - hopefully by name.

Pray for yourself.

Be spiritually prepared for the weekend - leave the baggage behind. Finish your palanca before you leave home (except it's a good idea to take along some paper to write notes to the people at your table after you have gotten to know each of them personally).

Plan to be at your table the entire weekend. We need table leaders at their tables except when they are giving their Rollo. This is extremely important in forming a table family.

Be sure to take along your sense of humor and your energy!

Go with the attitude that you are a servant in the Rollo room - the New Pilgrims should be the focus of your attention and concern. Be prepared to listen to them, affirm them, and be sensitive to their needs. Have this mindset before you arrive at the camp.

### Ground Rules for the Weekend

Arrive at the camp as early as you can on Thursday, get your belongings settled and be a member of the palanca team until the New Pilgrims arrive.

Be in the chapel for team meeting and worship at the assigned time (4:30 - 5:30 p.m.).

Play an active role in welcoming the New Pilgrims.

Put yourself in the shoes of the New Pilgrims as they arrive. Remember the progression of the weekend - be low-keyed but friendly. Make them feel welcome and be helpful - but don't overwhelm them.

Be inclusive - **don't** form sub-groups or cliques.

Remember there are no secrets at Via De Cristo - only nice surprises. Answer the New Pilgrims' questions freely.

Never try to set the stage or comment on what's going to happen next. There is no need to volunteer information.

Don't have any expectations for the New Pilgrims. Remember not everyone has a mountain top experience. Your goal should be to create an environment in which the Holy Spirit can work.

God will take over from there.

If one of the New Pilgrims at your table is having a problem, report it **discreetly** to a Spiritual Director as soon as possible. Or tell the Rector and he (she) will ask the Spiritual Director **for assistance**. Don't talk about the problem in front of other team members or New Pilgrims. And don't try to handle it yourself.

Be a leader - always be where you are supposed to be - and be prompt. When the Rector or Asst. Rector calls you, please respond quickly.

Listen attentively to Rollos and take notes every day (including Sunday) - and sing with enthusiasm.

Be a **facilitator** during the discussion and poster session. There should be about 10 minutes of discussion before the poster board and markers are placed on the table. If your table balks at doing posters, be reasonable about it. Make up a skit or a song if the poster becomes a real problem.

Be sure to listen to the ideas the Pilgrims have for the posters, they will have good ideas. Try and get all the pilgrims at the table involved in the poster session.

Being at least somewhat familiar with the schedule helps you to be a better leader.

Also, being familiar with the key points of the Rollos will help in shaping your table's discussion after each Rollo. It's easier to stay on the subject if you know what the subject is.

Chapel visits are led by the table leaders - start the discussion - start and end the prayer. Return promptly to the Rollo room when called.

Your role as a servant continues in your cabin - be attentive, affirming, sensitive to the needs of your cabin-mates.

**Table leaders should attend the Ultreya.**

## **Be an Active Listener at Your Table**

Be open and sincere in the way you talk with the people at your table. Be affirming of them.  
Listen with your heart.

Create an atmosphere of caring and trust. Remember that we experience Jesus through each other.

Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone. Concentrate on listening to what the speaker has to say, rather than thinking of what you want to say when the speaker has finished.

By some gesture or a word, acknowledge that you've heard what the person has said.

Pay attention to what's going on at your table. Don't be distracted by other people around you.

Quietly and tactfully, the table leaders should direct the discussion.

Only one person should speak at a time » don't form subgroups at your table.

Give each person an opportunity to speak - encourage quiet people to contribute to the discussion.

No one should come off sounding like an expert or authority.

Be mindful of the time - a discussion or poster session lasts about 30 minutes.

Be accepting and respectful of all points of view.

Keep group on subject - avoid discussion that isn't related to the Rollo. Don't be afraid of silence - especially after a powerful Rollo. Let the people at your table have time to reflect on what they've heard and what they're feeling.

## **The Art of Listening**

Pay full attention to the speaker; this shows that you care about what he/she is saying; listen with active interest.

You must want to listen to the other person; if your mind wanders, they can see that you are indifferent to them.

Be committed to listening even when you don't really feel up to it (late at night, when you want to talk to someone else, etc.)

Be patient; hear the person out; you don't need to fill every silence.

Empathize with the person speaking; see things from their point of view but don't take on their problems as your own. Be understanding, not codependent.

If someone is sharing something personal or confidential, try to find a quiet place to listen; if the problem is very troubling or needs immediate attention; discreetly contact a Spiritual Leader or the Rector.

Use positive body language (eye contact, sit forward, don't fidget).

Use reflective listening responses; prompt your speaker to share in more depth.

Listen for the answers to your questions; don't spend the time thinking up another question.

Don't ask too many questions; this isn't an interrogation.

Don't give advice, but you can be directive if necessary after listening to what the person is feeling. An example of a directive comment would be, "You might want to talk with a Spiritual Leader about that."

**Don't give solutions; you're not here to solve anyone's problems.**

Listen for everything the person is trying to communicate: feelings, thoughts, attitudes, opinions, body language, facts and information.

Listen for deeper spiritual concerns.

Remember what that person has shared previously.

Listen to what they don't say.

## **Tool number one is Piety or Prayer**

One of the most powerful tools you have as a table leader is the ability to plug into the power of God through prayer. As a starter, you might want to pray the following two prayers and then add prayers for the candidates at your table (by name when you learn their names) and some prayers tailored specifically to your own needs as a table leader:

### **FOR TACT**

O Lord, who art full of love and mercy, help me to be careful of the feelings of others. Let me beware of the hasty word, the praying question, and the indelicate allusion that hurts worse than a blow. Show me how to put the shy at ease, and to give them confidence by words of kindness and true interest in them. Keep me from blundering into the sacred places of others. Give me wholesome sense of the rights of others that I may not even seem to disregard them. Bestow on me keen insight, that I may see at once the fitting thing to do, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

### **FOR TOLERANCE**

Grant to me, Lord, I beseech thee, an open mind, ready to receive the truth and to act upon it. Show me that others have a right to their own opinions and help me see their point of view. Give me grace to feel that I may be mistaken. Help me not shut my mind to facts simply on the ground that I do not like them, but ever to give the same weight to those which are unpleasant as I would give to those which are pleasant because they are in my favor. Open the eyes of my soul to see the truth, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **SEEKING TOGETHER**

Let us, you and I, lay aside all arrogance. Let neither of us pretend to have found the truth. Let us seek it as something unknown to both of us. Then we may seek it with love and sincerity when neither of us has the neither rashness nor presumption to believe that he already possesses it. And if I am asking too much of you, allow me to listen to you at least, to talk with you as I do with beings whom, for my part, I do not pretend to understand. St. Augustine.

## **Tool number two is Study**

Another powerful tool you have as a table leader is the ability to plug into the wisdom of those who have gone before you and those who had the insight to put the design for Cursillo together in the first place.

You can become very familiar with and actually study:

1. The Via de Cristo method of Prayer, Study and Action.
2. The three phases and the growth opportunities in each:
  - a. Pre-Via de Cristo
  - b. The Weekend
  - c. Post-Via de Cristo
3. The progression and dynamics of the weekend, understanding the ways
4. The roles of team members.
5. The responsibilities of sponsorship.
6. How to become a contributing member in a renewal group.
7. How to strengthen your own 4th day and those of others.

## **What is Via de Cristo/Cursillo?**

Just as Jesus asked those who were involved with Him who they thought He was, it is appropriate for you, whether you are a first-time team member or an "old hand", to ask yourself what Via de Cristo is for you right now. Some say Via de Cristo is the joyful communication of being a Christian. Some say it is the proclamation of the Gospel as a living experience. Some say it is a witness by the entire team (and even the Fourth Day Community through palanca and support at the closing) to living the life in grace. What do you say Via de Cristo/Cursillo is?

## **What is the Via de Cristo/Cursillo Method?**

The Via de Cristo method is designed to help create a climate which will facilitate an encounter by the candidates (and often team members too!) with the Lord, a climate which helps remove barriers that would prevent the message from reaching the candidates' minds and hearts, a climate which helps break the bonds which enslave us all and prevent us from making free and conscious choices. The basic technique for Via de Cristo is simply preparing the way of the Lord. An essential part of this technique involves personal contact with the candidates: only when we get to know the candidates can we know what to say and how to say it. A keystone of the Via de Cristo method is personal freedom. The following kinds of questions are often heard at Via de Cristo: How is Sally doing? Is she getting it? These questions are truly irrelevant. First of all, we have no way of judging what is going on in Sally's mind and heart. What we construe as reticence or shyness may in fact be serenity and peace that Sally brought with her to Via de Cristo because she "got it" long before she ever heard of Via de Cristo. Secondly, even if we could discern whether Sally was really getting it or not, we can't control the outcome anyway. The temptation when someone isn't "getting it" is to do something to "make" them "get it". The Via de Cristo method calls for us to prepare the way and then leave it to the Lord to judge when and how a particular candidate "gets it". We have become accustomed at Via de Cristo to reaping. Sometimes, all we can do is sow and that's okay. The seeds will germinate and grow when they are ready and not according to our timetable. "Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses."

We can get in God's way by trying to force a particular reaction from the candidates. Respect for individual liberty has always been a major concern of Via de Cristo. We must respect without reservation - the freedom of the individual.

## **What is the atmosphere Via de Cristo strives for?**

The creation of the appropriate atmosphere and climate is extraordinary helpful to the effectiveness of Via de Cristo and this is the task of the whole team, particularly the table leaders. The "appropriate atmosphere" is one of joy and spontaneity which leads to openness, naturalness, sincerity and friendship. Feeling friendship and experiencing happiness are good preludes to understanding friendship with God and the good news of grace. Everything - from wit to dialogue, from singing to sharing, from listening to caring, from an atmosphere of sincerity to a respectful treatment of the dignity and problems of others - can contribute to creating a climate of friendship and joy at the Via de Cristo.

## **Why do we have table groups at Via de Cristo?**

In order to facilitate a spirit of sharing, promote an attitude of community, and open the doors of friendship, the candidates are assigned to table groups for which the table leaders are responsible. These groups are like renewal groups: in them we not only summarize the talks but also dialogue on the message proclaimed in each talk, so that, by in-depth sharing of the Christian experience, we may reach a progressively mature conversion. The table groups assure the possibility of the candidates' openness, helping them verbalize their doubts and exchange and share with their table-mates. Normally, on the first day, the group is simply a working team. Almost always, by the end of Via de Cristo, it will be a community of faith and love. If religious experience is a personal event, we all need individual help: thus, one of the main functions common to the whole team, but focused especially in the table leaders, is openness to personal dialogue and sharing with the candidates acting as a renewing leaven. This must be done on the basis of personal contact. The table leaders must open themselves up as friends without trying to probe the spiritual condition of the candidate. Only sincere friendship will offer ways for effective openness and dialogue. The techniques are opportunity, gentleness, tact and apostolic spirit. The leader makes friends with all, so that each one will make friends with the rest, and all will become friends with the Lord. This is most easily accomplished in the small groups at the tables.

## **Why do we have the poster party?**

The "Decuria" or "poster party" is like an Ultreya within the Via de Cristo itself.

No community can be closed in on itself. Therefore, at the end of the day on Friday and Saturday, there is a reunion or coming together of the different table groups. This reunion has as its objective, aside from sheer fun, the rounding out for the whole group of basic ideas given throughout the whole day. Each table shares their summaries of the day's talks, not by sharing the impact the talks had on the group. Participants become known as individuals as they report.

It is at this time that the tables present their posters which try to capture, graphically and often humorously, the ideas that have most impressed them during the day. The posters help create a climate of joy, dialogue and openness in the Pilgrim. They should be the fruit of the collaboration of all the group members; anything else would promote the unhealthy individualism of some and the disinterest of others. One of the dynamics of the "Decuria" is that the individual Pilgrim/candidate broadens his or her "personal space" to include other people with new and different viewpoints. The small table community grows to include all the other tables, and thus becomes one whole community, united in Spirit.



## **Tool number three is Action:**

After equipping yourself by prayer and study, you are now ready to act as a table leader. It is the sturdy and reliable Via de Cristo triad, or three-legged stool in operation - piety, study, and action, in that order.

## **Modeling: Don't Give It. Live It**

Your basic function as a table leader is to serve as a role model. The leader's mission is not so much to expound the truth, as to model it. So, each team member enters the Via de Cristo with the attitude of living it, not just giving it.

- \* Teach welcoming by greeting
- \* Teach songs by singing \* Teach listening by listening
- \* Teach note-taking by taking notes
- \* Teach sharing by being open
- \* Teach prayer by praying
- \* Teach care by caring
- \* Teach love by loving

## **Basic Objectives of Group Discussion**

Group discussion is an effective way to stimulate people with common interest to share views and to gain insights. In the Via de Cristo format, time is given to table discussions. The role of the table leaders is to guide those discussions to ensure the greatest possible participation. Some pointers to follow:

1. One person speaks at a time.  
Prevent sub-groups from developing by simply saying: \_\_\_\_\_ is talking now.  
Let's give her our attention.
2. Everyone has a chance to speak.  
"Let's hear from" \_\_\_\_\_ .  
\_\_\_\_\_, would you like to comment?"
3. Encourage the art of listening.

### **How to Actively Listen with Open-Ended Questions**

Once the door has been opened and you are seeking to draw the speaker more actively into dialogue, it is most appropriate to use open-ended questions. Generally, the "why" and "how come" questions cause the speaker to become defensive. Open-ended questions allow the speaker to feel your interest without feeling blamed, judged or evaluated. The following sentence stems are suggestions for how you may ask questions in a positive, emphatic manner:

1. When did you begin to feel... ?
2. Have you ever felt this way when ... ?
3. Was that something you wanted... ?
4. Have you looked at some other alternatives .. ?
5. Can you give some examples about... ?
6. What did you mean by... ?
7. Would you really like to... ?
8. Are you saying that... ?
9. Did you mean that... ?
10. Have you thought much about... ?
11. Have you consulted with someone regarding... ?
12. How is this important for you... ?
13. Would you like to share this with... ?
14. Is that a personal preference, or do you feel most people feel... ?
15. Why do you feel strongly about... ?

As your skill grows, you will find that you will be asking many questions and answering few. Your questions should be clear and concise, should aim at drawing from personal experience, and may require explanation of a view-point. You should avoid questions requiring only a "yes" or "no", questions that arouse antagonism. Example of questions:

1. What has been your experience? (to open up discussion)
2. How do the others feel about this? (to broaden participation)
3. You have made several interesting comments and I'm wondering if someone else has something to add? (to limit overactive participant)
4. Are we drifting away from the subject? (focus discussion)
5. How does that sound to you? (to an inactive participant)

### **Listening is a Skill We Can Develop**

We listen with our hearts. When I listen with my heart, I stop playing the game of non-listening. In other words, I step inside the other's skin, I walk in her shoes; I attempt to see things from her point-of-view; I establish eye contact; I give her conscious attention; I reflect my understanding of her words; I question; I attempt to clarify. Gently, I draw the other out as her lips stumble over words, or her face becomes flushed, or she turns her face aside. I make the other feel that I understand that she is important, that I am grateful that she trusts me enough to share deep, personal feelings with me. I grant her worth.

**LORD HELP US LISTEN WITH OUR HEARTS!**

## **Passive Listening Responses**

When others give you a clue (verbal or nonverbal) that they're experiencing problems, one effective way of helping them handle upset feelings is with passive listening responses. They show your acceptance and acknowledgement and encourage the other person to continue communicating. You are being asked to merely listen - to absorb the burden like water in a sponge. You are not a fixer.

Passive listening responses are: (1) attending; (2) silence; (3) acknowledgements; and (4) door openers.

Attending: This means being physically with another person when she or he expresses a problem. You demonstrate your willingness to listen by not busying yourself with other tasks, facing the other person, and maintaining eye contact. Silence: Your ability to remain silent or passively listen when the other person expresses a problem can be very helpful and encouraging, especially when the other person is just beginning to share a problem, or when she or he is experiencing a strong or deep feeling, such as sadness, fear or hopelessness.

Acknowledgements: These are brief expressions that indicate you're paying attention. To some extent, they also communicate your acceptance and empathy. They include such responses as: "I see," "I hear you," "uh-huh," "Really," and "I sure understand that."

Door Openers: These responses invite other persons to say more, to expand her or his thoughts, ideas and feelings. They demonstrate your acceptance and communicate your willingness to try to help. They include responses such as: "Do you want to tell me about it?" "I'd like to know more about how you feel." "Would you like to talk about it?" "Can I help" "You seem really quiet tonight - is something bothering you?"

## **The Bible Teaches Us How to be a Good Listener**

For your own study; look up:

- a. Proverbs 18:21
- b. Proverbs 25:11
- c. Job 19:2
- d. James 3:8-10
- e. 1 Peter 3:10

*In difficult situations, when you don't know what to do or say, say the Serenity Prayer:*

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

## Communication Guidelines Based on Scriptures:

1. Be a ready listener and do not answer until the other person has finished talking. Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19
2. Be slow to speak. Think first. Don't be hasty in your words. Speak in such a way that the other person can understand and accept what you say. Proverbs 15:23, 28; 21:23; 29:20; James 1:19
3. Speak the truth always but do it in love. Do not exaggerate. Ephesians 4:15, 25; Colossians 3:9
4. Do not become involved in quarrels. It is possible to disagree without quarreling. Proverbs 17:14; 20:3; Romans 13:13; Ephesians 4:31
5. Do not use silence to frustrate the other person. Explain why you are hesitant to talk at this time.
6. Do not respond in anger. Use a soft and kind response. Proverbs 14:29; 15:1; 25:15; 29:11; Ephesians 4:26,31
7. When you are in the wrong, admit it and ask for forgiveness. James 5:16. When someone confesses to you, tell them you forgive them. Be sure it is forgotten and not brought up to the person. Proverbs 17:9; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; I Peter 4:8
8. Avoid nagging. Proverbs 10:19; 17:9; 20:5
9. Do not blame or criticize the other person. Instead, restore ... encourage ... edify. Romans 14:13; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:11. If someone verbally attacks, criticizes or blames you, do not respond in the same manner. Romans 12:17, 21; I Peter 2:23; 3:9
10. Try to understand the other person's opinion. Make allowances for differences. Be concerned about their interests. Philippians 2:1-4; Ephesians 4:2

## Twenty Principles on the Art of Listening

1. Most people hear but few listens.
2. Inability - or unwillingness - to listen is the major cause of poor communication.
3. Poor listening means poor concentration, which means large ego.
4. A major index of emotional maturity is the ability to listen.
5. Pretend you have no voice. Not only will you interrupt less, you will hear far better.
6. Observe the good listener; even his physical posture shows concentration.
7. If it is worth saying, it is worth listening to.
8. Notice how often a poor memory goes with a poor listener.
9. Speak with enthusiasm but listen with calmness.
10. A top professional at anything is a master listener.
11. For one full day, speak as little as possible.
12. If you must speak, ask sincere questions.
13. An interrupter is usually guarding a closed mind.
14. Poor listeners: shuffle paper, look away, change the subject.
15. Good listeners: look you in the eye, give you all the time you need.
16. A great control for social tension is to practice the art of listening.
17. Disastrous decisions have been made by key people because they "tuned in" on the other

18. To listen, practice a listening attitude, a listening posture, and concentration. person's appearance or personality instead of on what that person was really saying
19. There is no such thing as an unpopular listener.
20. To succeed, you must understand. To understand, you must hear. To hear, you must listen.

## **How to Enable the Best in Each Other**

1. Don't interrupt
2. Don't probe
3. Don't give advice
4. Don't judge
5. Don't start a sub-group while someone is talking
6. Do listen attentively
7. Do affirm what is shared
8. Do build on each other
9. Do "stay" in the group

## **My Checklist**

At the end of each day, you may want to grade yourself to see how you are doing. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Was I warm and friendly?
2. Was I enthusiastic about people and the subject matter?
3. Did I create a protective climate where it was safe for people to share?
4. Did I support the candidates for their achievements?
5. Did I support my table partner and cooperate?
6. Did I keep a comfortable pace?
7. Did I invite the candidates to think?
8. Did I allow the candidates to discover things for themselves?
9. Did I take care of myself by being well prepared, take sufficient time for myself and affirm myself?
10. Did I learn with the group?
11. Did I have fun?
12. What will I do the same/different tomorrow?
13. Did I respect other's privacy and confidentiality?
14. What gifts did I give today?
15. What gifts did I receive today?
16. Did I see specific and practical answers to my prayers today?
17. Am I aware that God has called me to His purposes today?
18. Did I live in grace today? In joy? In peace?
19. Am I spiritually mature enough to find the gift in the situation, person, or circumstance that was most trying and most difficult for me today?