

THE PURPOSE AND INTENT OF VIA DE CRISTO

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

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

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

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

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

HISTORY OF VIA DE CRISTO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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VIA DE CRISTO
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS

