

# faith

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## AFTER A CURSILLO WEEKEND

BILL IS LIVING "THE FOURTH DAY"





“I’d been living a very ‘normal’ life,” Bill says. **“But sometimes you get to the point where you ask, ‘What’s next?’ Or maybe, ‘What’s missing?’** It’s something in your gut that tells you there is something more. That’s where I was before I went on Cursillo.”

### What is CURSILLO?

► Today’s Cursillo weekends are based on the original Cursillo, an international movement founded in the late 1940s by

Bishop Juan Hervás, bishop of the Diocese of Majorca, Spain. He felt that the Church needed to reconnect with the people. There are separate Cursillo weekends for men and women. Typically,

around 25 people attend each weekend. Four Cursillo weekends are held in the diocese each year: two for men and two for women.

The word “Cursillo” means “little course.” These small courses are given over the period of one weekend, Thursday night through Sunday night.

Each day of the Cursillo weekend begins with morning prayers and ends with night prayers. Mass is celebrated each day except Thursday.

► **For more information,** visit [tinyurl.com/DOLcursillo](http://tinyurl.com/DOLcursillo)

**BILL SOISSON IS NOT NATURALLY A SOCIAL MAN.** But recently, he decided to start greeting people as they entered the sanctuary of his parish, St. Andrew the Apostle in Saline, as a way of making them feel welcome.

"I got some strange looks the first couple of weeks, and it was a little uncomfortable for me, but I stuck with it," Bill says. "Pretty soon, I noticed that people who had been strangers were now smiling and saying 'hello.' Gradually, people I had never known were becoming friends."

Friendship is a powerful thing. That is the integral message of the Cursillo movement, something Bill learned while making a Cursillo weekend in October 2012. Since then, this "cradle Catholic" describes his life as "transformed."

"A lot of times you are given the pieces of the puzzle, but you don't see it put together. Cursillo put the puzzle together for me. It helped me zoom in and focus – like a camera lens – on what it means to be a friend in Christ," Bill says.

Bill didn't know what was missing in his life, but he knew of others who had been on Cursillo weekends. "People who had gone seemed to have such enthusiasm for their faith and their relationships with Christ. That was something I wanted, too," he explains.

"I had recently left the work force because of health reasons and was going to Mass more frequently. So when I was asked to go on a Cursillo weekend, I said 'yes.'" Bill didn't know what to expect, but he was open to finding out.

Cursillo is a movement within the Church that began in Spain in the early 1940s, born of the spirit of renewal that preceded the Second Vatican Council. The word means "short course." It is defined as an experience in Christianity that takes place over a three-day weekend retreat, and continues with ongoing participation in reunions and other gatherings of Cursillistas – those who have completed a Cursillo weekend.

In North America, the first Cursillo weekends were held in the early 1960s. The movement has grown into a worldwide apostolate that has been recognized by several pontiffs and is encouraged by the American bishops. It's estimated that some 45 million men and women around the world have taken part in Cursillo weekends.

Yet most Catholics don't know what Cursillo is or how it can impact their faith. "I was just a regular Catholic," Bill says. "I grew up going to Catholic schools. I went to Mass and we brought up our kids in the Church, but I didn't have that fire of faith. Cursillo has fanned the ember of faith that I had and really made it a burning flame."

Bill was born and raised in Connellsville, Pa., with a three-year detour to Malawi, Africa, from ages 9 to 12, where his parents served as missionaries. "My parents volunteered to do mission work in 1968, thinking they would probably be sent to the American West to work with Native Americans. I learned from an early age that service work

is something people do."

After graduating from Gannon University with a degree in engineering, Bill married his wife, Dianna, and they settled in Michigan, where he worked for Ford Motor Co. and later for Visteon, an automotive parts company.

Together they raised three children – Stephanie, 24, and Julie, 19, both education majors at Eastern Michigan University, and Billy, 21, an Army Reservist and student at Washtenaw Community College. Dianna is nanny to three children and an accomplished artist who recently completed a Cursillo weekend as well. "It was special in that after her first day she called me in tears telling me how much better she understood the changes in me. It has brought us closer together," Bill says.

"I'd been living a very 'normal' life," Bill says. "But sometimes you get to the point where you ask, 'What's next?' Or maybe, 'What's missing?' It's something in your gut that tells you there is something more. That's where I was before I went on Cursillo. It really helped me to focus on what is important in life."

Bill says Dianna and their children have noticed the change in him since his weekend: "Cursillo is more than just a retreat. Typically, a retreat will make you feel good for a few days, but that glow eventually wears off. That good feeling goes away. Cursillo, because it can become a way of life, works to keep that fire of faith ignited and burning brightly for all to see. It has really changed my life."

Cursillo weekends follow a formula so that the retreat is the same for all who participate. Like Kairos retreats for high school students, they include several talks on specific topics and unfold characteristically over the course of three days. They conclude with an emphasis on the "Fourth Day" – taking the message of the Cursillo into the wider world and sharing it with others.

"Living the Fourth Day includes getting together frequently with others to talk about the three pillars – piety, study and action. These form the tripod, the three-legged stool that keeps us focused. We get together once a week to encourage one another," Bill says. "There's no right way to live the Fourth. It's unique for each person. But it's a shared journey of faith." Group meetings include prayer, discussion and fellowship.

For Bill, the effect of Cursillo has been a newfound fearlessness, evident in his friendship ministry at St. Andrews, but also in his personal life. Last year, his doctors notified Bill that he had been injected from the contaminated batch of medication that put him at risk for meningitis. The drug had caused the deaths of several patients across Michigan. "Dianna was extremely worried while we waited through six months and several MRIs to see what would happen, but I was calm. My Cursillo helped me to accept that everything was going to be OK. It changed the way I approach fear and anxiety. I have a new strength through prayer that I didn't have before.

"Through my Cursillo, I learned I can be really brave, especially when I'm serving Christ and not myself.

"I have a friend who lost a child to cancer and now his marriage is ending. It feels to him like God is just throwing rocks at him. All I can do is spend time with him and be a friend. I'm powerless to solve anything in his life, and it's not my role to preach the Gospel to him. It's my role to live the Gospel and be a reflection of it, and let God use that as he will. Recently, my friend came to Mass with me. I was so happy for him I teared up ... all by just being a friend in Jesus.

"My hope is that my example will show others – especially my children – how to pursue their own formation, but, most importantly, realize our formation is never finished and that we need to make an active choice to be formed in the Lord." †