



PREPARING YOUR R.E.C. TALK

The focus of every *Cursillo*-type weekend is a series of talks that examine the state of the participant's life and spiritual issues in an attempt to lead that participant to the logical conclusion that they could achieve a richer, more fulfilling life by drawing nearer to Jesus Christ. Unlike the *Walk to Emmaus*, or even the *Chrysalis, Residents Encounter Christ* does not assume the participants have had any prior meaningful relationship with church life. Therefore we try to start at the beginning and move forward with an explanation and example of unconditional Christian love.

Rather than confront the resident with what we believe to be wrong with their lives we use talks and discussions that build on each other to lead them to their own conclusions. The purpose of this discussion is to show each speaker how their talk fits into the bigger picture of the weekend message.

Believe it or not inmates in correctional facilities rarely recognize that being in jail is evidence of a problem. While the focus is on the talk, the real work is done in the table discussions after the talks. So, understanding this, the speaker should make their talk brief (never more than 20 minutes) so there is adequate time for the discussion, to the point (covering the three points designated in each talk outline) and, hopefully engaging. It is essential that each speaker prepare his/her talk with an understanding of where their topic fits into the unfolding story of the weekend and what conclusions the listener should, hopefully, draw as a result of hearing their talk. Likewise, each talk should be built around specific points that can be used by the table leaders in the discussions afterward.

In preparing any of these talks it is important to avoid abstract conceptualizations or deep religious denominational doctrine. Rather, rely on clear concrete examples that conjure up mental pictures to which the listeners can relate and use in their discussions and posters.

In the 1950s there was a television game show called "Queen for a Day" in which women would compete to tell the saddest story. A panel of judges would then select the lady who told the most heart-wrenching story and name her Queen for a Day. She would be given a crown, a robe, a dozen roses and an array of prizes. In REC a good talk is measured by whether or not the speaker makes his/her three points and leaves the listener with the desired response, not how emotionally the speaker connects with the listener. All too often sad personal stories involve unresolved emotional and spiritual issues and leave the wrong overall impression on the listener. So these should be avoided. On the other hand personal examples that support or make one or more of the desired points can be very effective.

The explanations that follow are designed to help you prepare your talk so it will fit logically into the context of the daily theme and the progression of the weekend.

Daily Themes

While the team has prepared for weeks in advance and meets on Thursday night and Friday morning to make final preparations for the REC Weekend, the Residents are only aware of what is presented to them from late Friday afternoon until sometime Sunday afternoon. Each day the Residents are told the “theme” for that day and are reminded of the same before they leave each evening. On Friday they are told the theme is “Dying with Christ.” On Saturday it is “Rising with Christ” And, finally, on Sunday the theme is “Going with Christ.” What do those really mean?

Day One: Dying with Christ

As Christians we know that Christ died to atone for our individual sins and that all we need do to claim that atonement is accept Him as our personal Savior. Most REC participants don't know or understand that. So, the recurring themes woven into the talks on Day One are (1) our sinful nature, (2) God's desire to redeem us and (3) what we, as sinners, must do to receive our redemption. A better description of Day One might be “the life you've been living is a mess; but, God can fix it.” Since we know that it was Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection that accomplishes this we summarize it all by saying “Dying with Christ.” The talks for Day One and their purposes are as follows:

Ideals. Ideals are those intangible concepts we measure everything against. This is a purely secular talk that examines what drives us internally. Most little boys had heroes they dreamed of being just like. Most little girls had dreams of Cinderella. What was it about these figures that stimulated them? What has happened in their values to cause them to let go of those dreams? How have their values changed? Were their heroes super villains that designed perfect crimes? Did they hope someday to spend a portion of their lives in jail? Probably not. Although this talk does not begin with the Prayer to the Holy Spirit and God is not mentioned in this talk in any way the table discussions that follow ironically almost always include Him in some fashion.

Purpose of talk: to lead the listener to examine their own personal values and conclude for themselves that their lives are off track.

God is Calling. Usually considered a clergy presentation, this is a critical talk that sets the stage for the rest of the REC weekend. In many ways it is the REC version of the Prevenient Grace Talk from the Walk to Emmaus. This talk introduces the Residents to the Prayer to the Holy Spirit and is designed to assure each of them that (1) God knows and loves them, (2) He has a specific plan to lead them, individually, back to a life more abundant and that (3) their lives will never be complete without Him. And, because this talk introduces the concept we will call “wheat” throughout the weekend it is essential that this speaker clearly explain

what the term means, as we are using it in this context. Examples of the Prayer Chart, letters from other communities, banners, and “goodies” are used to explain the concept.

Purpose of talk: to assure the listener there is hope for each of them through Christ.

The Prodigal. Like the Ideals Talk this one does not begin with the Prayer to the Holy Spirit; but, unlike the other talks on Friday evening there is no discussion following the talk. This talk begins with a reading from of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, from the Book of Luke, and is a personal testimony from someone who, like the Biblical prodigal, has (1) turned his/her back on God, (2) lived a life of sin and (3) recognized the error of his/her ways and been accepted back into the loving arms of Christ. The talk should conclude with a summary of how the speaker’s life experiences mirrored the story in the Bible.

Purpose of talk: to cause the listener to understand that their personal sins are not too great for God to forgive.

At the end of the last talk the Residents are told that there will be no table discussion of that talk, that talk concludes the first day of the REC and that they should be in silence as they go back to their housing areas. The purpose of the silence is to keep them individually focused on the example they have just been given of someone who has “been there” and “done that.” Also, because we are aware that Residents, in general, tend to rebel against authority, we have imposed a rule we hope they will break when they get back to their housing areas. We hope they will get together and discuss the last speaker’s story and how portions of it are like episodes in their own lives.

Desired response: As each Resident leaves the conference room at the end of Day One what we want them to be thinking about is, “although I may have never thought about it, (1) “my life may be off track,” (2) “God can put me back on track if I am willing” and (3) “if God will take that last speaker back surely I have a chance too.” In short, there is hope for me.

Day Two: Rising With Christ

Even in ancient times Jesus’ victory over death set him apart from others who claimed to be the Messiah. As a result of their desire to be and live as much like Jesus as they knew how His followers became known as “Christians.” That promise of eternal life continues, today, to give us all hope and assurance that this life is not all there is. So, when we say that Day Two is about “rising with Christ” it is simply another way of saying that the recurring theme for the day will be about *‘how to live a Christian life.’* The talks for Day Two and their purposes are as follows:

A Change of Heart. While Christ presented Himself as a living sacrifice and did for us what we could not or would not naturally do for ourselves, there are a few steps we must each take to claim our victories. The essential points in this talk are: (1) we do not have to change before God will save us (that is, we do not have to earn our salvation), that (2) it is the patterns in our lives that keep us apart from God and we must be willing to allow those patterns to be changed and that (3) God will lead us, gradually, to new life patterns if we are willing.

Purpose of talk: to make it clear to the listener that God will not force Himself on them. They must take the first step by opening their hearts to change.

Sacred Scriptures. Unlike the Emmaus Talk, *Grow Through Study*, which focuses on effective methods of study, this talk should introduce the listener to the *Holy Bible* as if they were hearing of it for the first time. Ideally it should make them curious enough to want to read it for themselves. Points to emphasize are: (1) like an owner's manual for the soul, there is no limit to what can be learned as the scriptures are read again and again over the course of one's life, (2) personal knowledge of scripture is the only protection against the deceptions of the evil one and (3) an understanding of the history and nature of God's love is essential to a balanced Christian life (the first leg of the 'three-legged stool' concept of study, prayer and action).

Purpose of talk: to make the Residents hungry to know the mysteries and promises of God's Holy Word.

God is Love. Generally considered to be the second clergy talk, with an emphasis on John 3:16, this talk should help the listener gain a greater understanding of what unconditional love really is and how far God will go to win us back into the Body of Christ. Points to be emphasized are: (1) I am lovable, (2) God really does love me and (3) I have to be willing to receive the love.

Purpose of talk: to cause the Residents to understand that, regardless of their station in life, they are precious to God and that the forgiveness of their sins has already been bought with the Blood of Christ.

Prayer. As in any other relationship it is necessary for Christians to talk to God and patiently wait for His answers. Reference should be made to the prayer most familiar to the Residents, the "Lord's Prayer." At the conclusion of this talk the listener should take comfort in the knowledge that (1) prayer is powerful, (2) prayer is essential to being a Christian (the second leg of the 'three-legged stool' concept) and, most importantly, (3) prayer is easy.

Purpose of talk: to cause the Residents to be at ease with the fact that, because He really does love us, God really wants us to share our innermost burdens, hopes and gratitude with Him, through prayer.

Christian Life. This talk could just as well be named “Jesus with Skin On” or “Walking the Walk.” It is about the “action” leg of the three-legged stool. It is about the activities typically pursued by Christians – how they live their lives and show their love for Jesus day-to-day. In short, the slogans on our shirts should not be the only clue the rest of the world has that we are followers of Christ. Or, if being a Christian were a crime could anyone find enough evidence to get us convicted? In presenting this talk the speaker should (1) dispel the notion that Christians can no longer enjoy their lives, (2) cover the types of things Christians do individually and together and (3) that Christian faith naturally leads to Christian action.
Purpose of talk: faith without works is dead.

Means of Grace. As Christians we know that the only true means of receiving God’s grace is the work that is done in each of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. For the past two days each talk has been leading the listener closer and closer to accepting Christ by presenting him/her with topics to be used by the Holy Spirit. By introducing the concept of “sacraments” the speaker explains the importance of confession and repentance in coming to Christ. In short, this talk should not be a dissertation on all the things learned in seminary. Rather, it should dwell on the facts that (1) we have all sinned and owe a price for having done so, (2) Jesus has already died to pay that price for our sins and (3) that God will forgive us if we ask him to in the name of Jesus.

Purpose of talk: to prepare the Residents for the most important aspect of the REC weekend, *Dying Moments – those special times in our lives when we voluntarily choose to give up whatever is between us and God.*

Desired response. At the end of this very long day we want to leave the Residents with another message of hope – (1) God really does love him/her, (2) living a Christian life is not as hard as they might once have thought and (3) it is something they, too, are capable of doing.

Day Three: Going with Christ

On the surface saying that the theme is “To Go with Christ” seems like it may make more sense than the other two themes. But, *where* are we going with Christ? We are going back into the “world.” The world is what most Residents think they know the most about. The difference is that this time they are not going into the world alone. Of course, they’ve never really been there alone, regardless of how tough they think they are. We know that God’s Prevenient Grace has always been there; but, most of them are learning it for the first time.

On this final day of the weekend the talks will concentrate on those aspects of what we call “the world,” that can work to rob them of the treasures God has given. The first two talks zero in on relationships – the things we human beings are most often failures at managing. Then they will hear a talk on how they can expect the world to respond to them as new Christians and how perseverance will protect them from the pitfalls that lay ahead. Finally, the last talk will introduce them to the REC Community and the types of behavior that can hurt or help the REC movement. The talks for the final day and their purposes are as follows:

Single Life. This talk, and the one that follows, are the most misunderstood talks of the REC. Perhaps a better name for this talk would be the “Single Christian Life.” This talk should concentrate on the challenges of being both a single person and a Christian in a world where singles are tempted from every side to be everything except Christians. The speaker should give examples of how to avoid or overcome common temptations like sexual misconduct, pursuit of addictions and/or shirking responsibilities they have already acquired, like child support, the care for dependent children or aging or dependent relatives. Points to be covered are (1) we humans need to learn to recognize those relationships that enhance our lives and those that diminish them, (2) we should strive to be responsible for our selves and to others and (3) we should seek opportunities to grow in Christ.

Purpose of talk: to give the Resident tools to retain Christian principles during those seasons of our lives when we are single.

Married Life. Like the previous talk a better title would be “How to Have a Happy Christian Marriage. Unless it is essential to an understanding of what makes your marriage work for you today this talk should not include the painful background of how the two of you came together. Ideally, this talk should be given by a couple that has been together for a long time. It should include tips for success in living as part of a team that is Christ-centered. Points to be made should be that (1) marriage is not a destination, but rather a step along the way to living a happy Christian life, (2) it is never merely a 50/50 proposition but requires a 100% commitment and (3) God has to have a role in a marriage to make it work.

Purpose of talk: to help the Resident understand that God is a requirement to truly make a marriage work.

These talks are followed by a question and answer session in which the Residents can ask any of the presenters questions about how they do this or that to be successful in their choice of walks in life.

Christian In The World. This talk is a cross between the Emmaus talks of Obstacles to Grace and Perseverance. What distinguishes this talk from Christian Life is the influences of “the world.” While the Christian Life

talk concentrated on how Christians live their lives, this talk is about the inner struggles all Christians face in staying true to Christ while living in an unchristian world. Points to cover are (1) the world will try to rob them of their new spiritual values, (2) it is all part of a struggle all Christians face and (3) God will never put more on them than they are equipped to handle.

Purpose of talk: to warn the Residents that Christians will find themselves under attack but have a Savior that will pull them through any adversity.

Beyond REC. This is the wrap up talk that introduces the concept of the “Fourth Day.” Examples or references from each of the other talks presented during the weekend are used to tie all the messages together. Residents are encouraged to not form cliques nor misrepresent REC by only talking about the food and fun times. And they are encouraged to keep the faith and the peace they have found during the weekend. And, finally, the importance of finding a home church where they are comfortable is stressed along with a brief explanation of other community support options available to them. Points to be made are (1) their “fourth day” lasts for the rest of their lives, (2) they can help build up REC or they can hurt it by how they behave in next days and (3) support is available to them when they are back on the outside.

Purpose of talk: to demonstrate continuity between all the other talks and wrap up the weekend.

During the last three days Residents should have realized that the very fact that they are in jail suggests that their lives need a change. God is the only one that can cause a permanent change in any of us and that living the life He wants for us is something even they can do. The world will not go away. Rather, the forces of the world will try to get them to turn away from God if they are not committed. But God will give them the strength they need to persevere.

If each speaker will faithfully make the points described in their talks; and, if the Table Leaders and Assistants will keep the discussions on topic, the overall response in the Residents’ minds at the end of the weekend will be “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

As is true in any persuasive situation the better you know your audience the better you will be at positively conveying your message to that audience and getting your desired result. Likewise, ignoring the mindset of your audience is likely to result in a *faux pas* at best, and may actually reverse the value of your communication altogether.

We know that residents of correctional facilities have a somewhat different mindset from the general population at large. For one thing most of them feel that they are victims of an unjust legal system, that they have been “picked on” and that everyone else is also guilty of the offense(s) of which they are accused. Who knows? From time to time that may be the case. In most cases they are probably guilty of offenses far worse than the one(s) for which they are currently charged. In any case they all hold tightly to their Constitutional presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

In REC we avoid the subject of what a Resident is charged with. The reason we are there has nothing to do with their charges. And, if asked, most of them will tell you they are innocent anyway. Here is a very important thing you must fully understand. **That profession of innocence comes with an “implied wink.”** In jail it is irresponsible, if not dangerous, for a Resident to confess his or her crimes, even if they are repentant. Jails are filled with “snitches” – those who would betray them in a heartbeat in hopes of getting a better slant on their own sentences. Therefore it is important to never be quoted as suggesting they are actually guilty. Even if they eventually accept a plea bargain and enter a guilty plea they will, typically, maintain their innocence. It’s a matter of pride – or “honor among thieves” if you will. That’s the “wink.” “The said I did such and such; but, I was just hanging around there and don’t know who did it.” *wink*

Offenses of a sexual nature

If you have ever been charged, or even accused, of offenses of a sexual nature this information should not be part of your talk. Sexual offenses, like rape or child molesting, are particularly offensive to other offenders; and, those convicted of such crimes are often abused in jails and prisons, many times requiring segregation for the general population for their own protection. You can present a multitude of witnesses espousing your innocence; but, the Residents will take your denial with the “implied wink.” You run the risk of losing your audience; and, the points of your talk will be automatically discounted. They will, likely, hear nothing else you have to say after that point. It is very important to build credibility for the entire team and for REC in general. So, including information – which is really unneeded – has just the opposite affect.

Being the victim of rape or child molesting is a completely different story. This is especially true on a women’s weekend. Society is just starting to learn what men and women have been keeping secret all their lives. Our experience is

that perhaps as many as 100% of incarcerated women were molested as children. It is also our experience that many of them have also suffered the molestation of their children by their series of husbands (often not the actual child's father) and boyfriends. If you are willing to share your "secret" it will probably build a bond between you and your audience. However, it is not required, by any stretch of the imagination. And it should not be a part of every single talk if avoidable. The single common bond we want to demonstrate is our Christian Walk, not our suffering. And, unless you are largely healed from your suffering it may not be helpful to bring it up at all.

Crimes for which you have not been charged and/or punished

Out of respect for the facility that is hosting us we should never confess to, or brag about, criminal offenses for which we have not been charged or punished – even though that might strengthen our credibility with the Residents. Many of us in REC have a sordid past. We have not always been Christians; and, we have, certainly, not always lived lives that are effective representations of Jesus. The degree to which this is true will vary from one to another. Even those of us who have surrendered to Christ at a very early age have "gotten away" with things that run contrary to the laws of the land. And most of us have gotten away with things that some of the Residents are currently charged with, like drinking and driving or non-support. As Christians we know that God will forgive us if we are willing to confess our sins to him and repent from repeating them. The Criminal Justice System is not so understanding or forgiving.

Most crimes have a statute of limitations. Others, like murder and tax evasion, do not. If there is a statute of limitations it is most likely to be at least 7 years. A "statute of limitations" is a provision of criminal law that limits the government's power to bring charges against us after the prescribed time has lapsed. Even crimes that do have such a provision may have exceptions that extend it. For example, in Indiana, child molesting (which includes what most states refer to as "statutory rape") has a general statute of limitations. However, if the perpetrator used force or threats against the victim if they told anyone that statutory period is extended. If deadly force was part of the threat there may be no statute of limitations at all. And, as O. J. Simpson learned even if you manage to skate through criminal court you may still be held accountable in civil court. Why take the chance of prosecution?

Several years ago, in a Sunday church service in the Clark County Jail, a Resident named Cory Webb had a very moving spiritual experience and confessed to the entire room that he had killed a close friend in Florida. At that time Jail Officers were present at all services. The Jail Officer, which I will not name, was duty-bound to relay the confession and eventually testify against Cory in his murder trial in Florida. Cory was convicted. I never heard what his sentence was; but, he was convicted and is being punished severely. Including information about your past should never include mention of offenses for which you have not been charged or punished. It is rude to the host facility; and, it is just plain dumb.

Focus on Christ rather than yourself

As has been pointed out in other documents the purpose of the talks is to stimulate conversation among the Residents and the Table Leaders and Assistant Table Leaders. The conclusions the Residents can come to on their own is far more powerful and important than something “profound” that might be included in your talk. Our purpose is to lead the Residents to Christ. Christ should be the center of your talk, not your own story.

The only talk that should be based on your own life is “The Prodigal”; and, even then the purpose of the talk is to demonstrate how your life has paralleled that of the foolish young man Christ described in his “Parable of the Prodigal Son (or Daughter).” Christ used this parable to explain how God’s love for us is unconditional regardless of how far we have let ourselves go. This is not to say that examples from your own life are not powerful ways to demonstrate a point. But don’t try to tell your WHOLE life’s story.

Each talk has a prescribed time limit that should be followed every time. Every time. Every time. Many speakers feel that the Holy Spirit has suddenly given them extensions to their talk. That is doubtful. The Holy Spirit provides order, not chaos. Other speakers feel that what they have to say is more important than what the Residents will discover in their table discussions. That is also extremely doubtful. To let your talk run over the time limit is self-serving and extremely rude to the Residents, to the other speakers, to the Lay Director and to our Lord Jesus. It is also a sign of poor preparation. Many REC speakers ask the Lay Director, or another team member to give them a five minute warning to wrap up in order to stay within their temporal objective.

Each talk has three important points that need to be made to further the over all story of the weekend. Make sure those points are made. If you have given that talk before the points were added to the outlines review your talk and be sure you are on point. Your talk is a piece of a much bigger picture. Help us paint that picture.

If your talk is an “advice” talk, like “Single Life” or “Marriage,” be sure the emphasis is on advice, not on how you managed to meet and marry your spouse. Most Residents don’t have a problem colliding with love interests. What they need to know is how to maintain their Christian walk as a single person, and how to include Christ in all aspects of their marriage. They need to know how to be real Christians. If you are asked to give the “Marriage” talk and you have not been married to your current spouse for a respectable number of years it will be difficult for you to give sound advice; and, you should probably decline. Anybody can make a mess of marriage. Many, if not most of the Residents, have done just that. They need to know how to do just the opposite. If you have been married 15 to 20 years you and your spouse have found a system of dealing with problems that works for you. The Residents need to know how you do it. Time is the measurement of an effective marriage not “how right” you think you are for each other.

Summary

Okay, if you will learn and respect the mindset of your audience, avoid mention of things you've "gotten away with" and center your talk on Christ, rather than yourself you are well on your way to writing and giving an outstanding REC talk. God bless you.

