

## BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

Over the last several months, during the Year of Faith proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI in October 2012, I've shared significant faith-events in my life and our family, leading us into full time lay ministry in 1977 and on to our service today through Living Bridges.

This Journey with Jesus began with a desperate need for God's help following my father's illness and death in 1965.

There is nothing like a real-life crisis to get our attention and open our hearts to something new. The "something new" began with local courses on lay spirituality, following the closing of Vatican II in 1965. Anna and I were looking for answers to help our oldest son, Robert, who was deeply effected by his grandfather's death.

As we attended these courses, we got a lot more than answers to faith and life issues – we met a group of real Christians. We were so taken by these wonderful people, who seemed to radiate joy and a welcoming spirit.

As new friendships developed, we were struck by their focus on Jesus and a life of faith contrasted to the climb of upward mobility and financial rewards, which occupied most of my time and energy. These were happy people whose riches were different than anything we had ever experienced. Slowly we discovered that Jesus was the source of their joy and the vehicle that propelled them was the "Cursillo" – translated from the Spanish "A short course in Christianity."

We found out later that a Cursillo motto was – **"Make a Friend, be a Friend and Introduce your Friend to Jesus."** As we discovered what Christian friendship was all about, we were naturally drawn to ask about the Cursillo. The response was as Jesus had said – "Come and See."

We didn't get much detail, beyond the fact that The Cursillo came out of Spain in the 1940's and it started with a 3 day retreat. Based on growing trust in our new friends, we accepted their invitation to attend. Due to schedule conflicts, I couldn't make a Cursillo weekend until March 1968. Anna followed on a women's weekend three weeks later.

God's timing is always perfect, as I joined the 11<sup>th</sup> Men's Weekend, at the old mother house (St. Catherine's) at the Dominican Retreat House in Elkins Park. We had no idea of the power of what we were being drawn into.

Anna and I had different reactions to the Cursillo 3-day weekend, and the follow-up program called "The Fourth Day." Anna came from a holy Catholic family, but was very reserved personally. I came from a non-religious immigrant family, but was naturally outgoing, working

for years in sales. The Cursillo and the new life it gave us, turned our lives upside down and moved us into a totally new direction – a life in grace, lived as a family.

We were propelled into a journey with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, toward the wonders of God the Father and unconditional love. Slowly, but surely everything changed. We had a new vision for our family, new friends, new activities, holy priests and service within this movement for at least five years.

The Cursillo grace led us into the beginnings of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in 1970 and the Marriage Encounter shortly after this.

In 1977, our lives took another dramatic turn, as the Holy Spirit drew us deeper into a journey of faith and full time lay ministry beginning with Families in Christ (1980) and Living Bridges in 1985. As we continue seeking to live each day, what the Cursillo taught us: **Make a Friend, Be a Friend, Introduce your Friend to Jesus**” – we are discovering the great wisdom and wonderful models of faith given through the Cursillo.

Christian family and friendship with God have become the goals of our journey to the Father.

A line in the Canon of the Mass for Children says it so simply, but powerfully:

“Jesus came to take away our sin, so we can be friends” – with each other and with God’s family – the Church.

De Colores,

Bob Iatesta

Bob and Anna are cofounders of Living Bridges

[www.livingbridges.org](http://www.livingbridges.org)