

Carol Stier
Buffalo Cursillo Historian

Buffalo Cursillo History #1 (October 2021 Newsletter)

I interviewed Lou Pauly who was 91 years old last summer (2020) via telephone to ask him about the beginnings of the Buffalo Cursillo Movement. The following are directly from our interview and notes that he sent to me and from Buffalo Cursillo archives.

Lou and Liz Pauly grew up in Erie, PA and moved to Buffalo in 19

58. They traveled back and forth to visit family and friends. They first heard about the Cursillo from Fr. Jim Peterson and friends in Erie. Lou and Liz made their Cursillo weekends in Erie in 1964, but there were no Ultreyas or any Cursillo activity in Buffalo as yet.

Over a period of time, they discovered that there were some Cursillistas in Buffalo, who had made their weekend in other parts of the country. These included Fr. Barry Smith, Val Sabol, Mary Bielman, Losi and Tomas Rivera. “We all shared enthusiasm for a movement which had revitalized the lives of so many, shed light on the darkness of many minds, and given direction to many lives. We realized that excitement and praise for the movement is the message of Christ and His Gospel.

Liz and Lou placed an article in the Buffalo Catholic newspaper asking anyone who had made the weekend in other parts of the country to call. The first meeting of these Buffalo Cursillistas was arranged by Val Sabol to be held at St. Nicholas Parish hosted by Rev. Herold Nuwer, the pastor who was also a Cursillista. “We sat around the dining room table talking about our experiences and getting to know one another”.

Some members of the Buffalo Inner City Apostolate including Marvin Lewis and Richard James had made Cursillo in Erie, PA in 1963 and 1964. Fr. Dave Doyle, Fr. Antonio Rodriguez and Tomas Rivera were intent on beginning a Spanish Cursillo Movement in WNY as there was a large Catholic Puerto Rican population in Dunkirk and on the West Side of Buffalo.

The above increased the number to ten at the monthly meeting (not yet called an Ultreya). It began with a prayer service and reunion in church followed by coffee and doughnuts in the rectory.

{From Lou Pauly's 40th year Reunion of the Buffalo Cursillo talk given Dec. 9, 2005.} “We discussed the many events that were taking place in the Church at the time. The Vatican Council had just ended. New things were happening in the Church – altars were being turned around to face the people, English instead of Latin, home Masses, no longer the long fast before Holy Communion, shaking hands at the sign of peace, people singing at mass, more lay involvement, sisters changing their style of dress. Many thought the Church was on a road to ruin. The Cursillo Movement embraced the changes and dealt with the spirit of Vatican II in an organized way.

After a few months, the conversation revolved around the Cursillo in Buffalo. The first step was to speak to Bishop McNulty to see if permission would be granted.

The Pauly's, Fr. Barry Smith and representatives from the Spanish and Black communities met for a thirty-minute audience with the Bishop, who had everyone sit in a circle. He asked each person to explain why they wanted Cursillo in Buffalo. Bishop McNulty who had made his Cursillo in New Jersey before he was transferred to Buffalo, readily gave his permission saying, "I don't understand why you haven't already started."

Lou recalls standing outside of the Chancery with Liz and Fr. Barry (the others had left) saying: "Now that we have permission, what do we do now?"