

Holy Play

A South Carolina Lutheran Via de Cristo Publication

News of the Essentials, a guideline being used by Rectora Kathy Thomas and her team for the upcoming October 4-7 weekend is being overwhelmingly received from the community as a resounding, “Yes and thank you!”

Men...and women tend to complicate. When this is done, we are really puffing up our self, and telling God we know better. God has and always will keep it simple. Love every one. Feed my sheep.

In life’s business, we all from time to time need to consider a course correction on many levels of our thoughts and actions. What course correction should you be reflecting on regarding SC Lutheran Via de Cristo? Reunion Groups? Praying First? The Prayer Banner? Sponsoring a Pilgrim? Secretariat Involvement? Other involvement? Only you and God know. I encourage you to pray first then listen to that voice in your heart. Then take that first step out of love for Him, not guilt! The October 4th weekend is coming soon.

Below will show a parallel of how we too as a community moved away from the simple to the complicated. The Secretariat supports this course correction back to the Essentials. Come and join celebrating your weekend by doing something special God wants you to do...Peace...Gus

UEC Basics

Unidos en Cristo — Back to the Basics Part 2

Submitted by Mary Marcoux, UEC Clergy Coordinator

This is the second in a series of columns to help us re-examine our UEC roots and get back to the basics. (For full introduction, see the last issue of the Palanca Press).

Through the years, many things have “snowballed” in UEC, not only costing us more money, but--more importantly--the time and energy of Team members, and—even more importantly—it deviates from the ebb and flow of the spiritual nature of the Weekend.

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In our last PP issue we took a look at “Las Mananitas” or the Morning Serenade. In this issue we take a look at Saturday night’s Agape Dinner. Original Intention: To feel the love of God and genuine Christian community in an atmosphere of peace and beauty. “Agape” = unconditional, spiritual love--God’s love.

The most memorable Agape Dinner I’ve ever experienced was held in a gym. As we walked in, we immediately noticed the “large table” in the center. There was no mistaking the fact that the tables were placed in the form of a cross. A large, empty chair from the church sanctuary had been symbolically placed at the head of the table. There were no “escorts” nor had the room been sectioned off with dark paper or cloth walls. There was no prom-like atmosphere. If there were candles or flowers, I don’t remember.

What I do remember are the eight older women who comprised the entire Kitchen Team. After they served us, they lined up, put their arms around each other and swayed in unison as they sang a couple of gentle Cursillo songs. They used no accompaniment; only their ordinary voices, joyful smiles, and giggles if they stumbled over words or notes. They still had their kitchen aprons tied around their waists—none of which matched because they were simply aprons that each had brought from home. I remember hearing one of the weekenders gasp, “First they prepare and serve us this lovely meal and now they’re serenading us...unbelievable.” People were touched, grateful, and teary.

This is how a 30 year-old sheet of instructions describes the Agape Dinner: One of the high points Saturday evening is the evening Agape Meal. The dining hall is lit with candles, all the banners are put up, the tables are decorated, and the scene is one of peace and beauty. Two things that may add much are (1) having the tables arranged in a cross or other symbol and (2) having the kitchen and palanca teams hold candles and sing two or three slow moving songs to the weekenders as they enter the room. That is all the instruction given for the Agape Dinner.

And now the snowball: • It was not unusual for the music leader to accompany the Kitchen and Palanca Teams when serenading. Gradually, the Kitchen or Palanca

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members began bringing in a “special” musician or two. Now there are often a good number of more “professional” musicians from the community.

- I am not exactly sure when the decision was made to make a “special room” by initially using expensive photographer’s dark paper, but it was already in use by the early 80’s. The same can be said of the “flowered cross” suspended from the ceiling.

- As the “room” got “fancier”, so did the team’s clothing. People began “dressing up” to serve; gone were the older women with their mismatched aprons. I remember one women’s weekend where the Kitchen Team actually wore long evening gowns.

- Somewhere along the line, members of the opposite sex began doing the serving — spouses of Team members. I know this has on occasion actually been unsettling for recently widowed or divorced weekenders.

- It used to be that the Weekenders walked into the room as a group and experienced the beauty as a whole. At some point, they decided to “escort” Weekenders one by one, which not only takes a considerable amount of time and people, but it often leaves waiting Weekenders impatient and bewildered. More than once [over the years] I have had to accompany a Weekender in myself because they were becoming nervous--even scared--about what was happening on the other side of the door and wondering why it was taking so long.

In the midst of singing for our supper and the fancy decor, the immediate recognition that the tables are in the form of cross or that the chair at the head of table is empty for “our most honored guest” has been diminished. In fact I now often heard Weekenders comment, “Gosh, I didn’t even notice that.” It now takes all afternoon and dozens of people to set up for the Agape Dinner and then serve, not to mention the expense.

A challenge to consider: To return to the simple and loving nature of the Agape Dinner. Do we feel we have to rely on material means and a somewhat magical setting to convey God’s love rather than the loving consideration of a Team serving in God’s name? Is there a way to cut back, simplify, and rely on God love to create “the atmosphere”?