

Brief History of the Beginning of the ACTS Retreats
According to Joe Hayes
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The history of ACTS would not be complete without the mention of the “*Cursillos* in Christianity” retreats. *Cursillo* began in Spain sometime between WWI and WWII. *Cursillo* (Spanish for “short course”) intended to be a short course on the Catholic faith, and soon became widely popular for its profound effect on peoples’ spirituality. By the 1980's *Cursillo* was popular in the Archdiocese of San Antonio with many members of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH) in Selma, TX, having attended a *Cursillo*.

Ed Courtney and Joe Hayes from OLPH Parish and Marty Sablik from St. Luke's parish in San Antonio, TX were involved in *Cursillo*. Joe was the Archdiocesan Lay Director of *Cursillo* in 1986. Ed and Marty were also members of the *Cursillo* Secretariat. Archbishop Patrick Flores requested to be briefed several times a year on how *Cursillo* was doing. One of Archbishop Flores' wishes was that *Cursillo* allow non-Catholics to attend a retreat. Joe Hayes told the Secretariat of Archbishop Flores' wishes but the Secretariat refused to honor his wishes. The San Antonio *Cursillo* secretariat would not allow non-Catholics to attend its retreats nor would it allow a particular parish to have a *Cursillo* retreat for just that parish's members. As a result, Joe, Ed, Marty and others resigned from the Secretariat.

Several months later Ed, Joe, and Marty met to consider doing a parish retreat rather than a *Cursillo*. The three men met at the Jim's restaurant at Blanco and Loop 410. It was here that the development of starting a new retreat was discussed. The three men laid out a plan to initiate the development of a parish retreat. Joe, who at the time was also President of the OLPH Pastoral Council met with Father Patrick Cronin, pastor of OLPH, to discuss a new retreat concept. Father Cronin approved of the men's ideas and directed Joe to bring the matter before the OLPH Pastoral Council for approval to begin developing a parish retreat for OLPH. Joe asked the council for permission to meet with Archbishop Flores to present the parish retreat idea and to establish a planning committee if Archbishop Flores gave his approval. The council approved both of these measures.

Joe met with Archbishop Flores and presented to him the Pastoral Council's approved plans for a parish retreat along with Father Cronin's endorsement. Archbishop Flores gave his permission and blessing for developing a new parish retreat with the condition that the retreat allow non- Catholics to attend without any pressure to convert them to Catholicism. The Archbishop wanted non-Catholics invited so if they were married to a Catholic, they could understand what their spouse's experienced on their retreat and experience the powerful sense of community which has been so prevalent within the OLPH family. This stipulation was agreed upon and Archbishop Flores gave his approval and blessings to start plans for the retreat. He appointed Joe as an Archdiocesan Executive Council President and requested regular updates and briefings on the development of the retreat.

The Archdiocesan Executive Council was formed with the following members from OLPH and members from other parishes who became interested in bringing these retreats to their parishes:

MEMBER	PARISH
Donna Boone	OLPH
Gene Boone	OLPH
Les Coalson	OLPH
Ed Courtney	OLPH
Terry Dudley	OLPH
Joe Hayes	OLPH
Robert Lee	St. John Neuman
Karen Mansfeldt	Our Lady of Guadalupe
Marty Sablik	St. Luke's
Sue Weaver	OLPH
Ruth Ann Wortman	OLPH

Archbishop Flores and OLPH Pastor Father Cronin provided continued guidance and prayer each step of the way. The overwhelming success of ACTS over the years is due to the ever-working presence of the Holy Spirit within hundreds of people who carried forward the retreats.

An example of the workings of the Holy Spirit was in the decision on what to call the retreat. At each meeting of the council, discussions and suggestions for a name would be discussed but the committee did not spend a lot of time on this knowing that a name would come forth somewhere along the development of the retreat. It didn't take long. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working through a very devout Catholic florist, Wallace Vaughn from St. John Neumann Parish, a name would be revealed.

Wallace called Joe one morning and told him about a dream he had the previous night. Wallace stated that he had a dream in which the Holy Spirit told him to read Chapter 2, verses 42-47 of the Acts of the Apostles. This verse describes what the committee wanted to achieve on the retreat weekend and Wallace added that the Holy Spirit wanted the retreats to be called "ACTS". When brought to the attention of the committee Ruth Ann Wortman stated that if the Holy Spirit spoke to Wallace, that is what we should do; we should call the retreat "ACTS." The committee voted unanimously to name the retreat "ACTS."

Through the discernment and research of Ed Courtney the terms Adoration, Community, Theology, and Service became the precepts of the ACTS retreat. This was another example of the Holy Spirit truly working through someone in developing what today we call the four pillars of the ACTS retreat. Members of the ACTS council worked on developing retreat schedules, talks, sacramental's, parish needs, and other aspects of the retreat to formulate a spiritual experience where retreatants would develop a deeper relationship with God.

Marty worked on developing retreat schedules; duties of retreat director and co-director; and worked on retreat talks.

One of the goals of the ACTS retreat was to use prayer life (Adoration) to create a spiritual environment; (Community), through the study of scripture and our Catholic faith (Theology); and encouraging parishioners to join various ministries in the parish to meet Pastoral needs for our Pastor (Service).

The first men's ACTS retreat took place July 23-26, 1987 at the Omega Center in Boerne with Joe as the director and Marty as co-director.

Donna Boone was director of the women's first retreat with Ruth Ann Wortman as the co-director. The women's retreat was held at the Omega Center October 1-4, 1987.

Retreatants were encouraged to practice Adoration, Community, Theology, and Service in their home community, work community, and wherever they go to show others they are people of good moral values and faith.

The continued success of ACTS is directly a result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the discernment of retreatants and team members over the years. One of the main reasons for the development of ACTS was to make the weekend a parish weekend through its sacramental's, traditions, ministries, and parish needs. OLPH has achieved through the four pillars of ACTS and other ministries its current parish Mission statement: "a caring community where God's presence can be found; where God's word can be heard; where God's love can be seen and felt; and where everyone feels welcome." You can see how the four pillars of ACTS are evident in OLPH's mission statement.

ACTS started to spread to other communities and states due to the attendance of many active duty military and civilians in San Antonio attending the ACTS retreats. When they transferred to other locations and jobs, they took ACTS with them to their new parishes.

With the development of the ACTS Missions in San Antonio, the ACTS retreats have also spread throughout Texas Archdioceses, other states, and other countries in Latin America, Europe, and Africa. Historical data from the Archdiocese ACTS Missions office has determined that over a million people have attended ACTS retreats since its inception in July 1987. How did this happen? By the continued intercession of the Holy Spirit through the many people who attend and work ACTS retreats.

The rest is history. There are thousands of men and women from OLPH (as well as from other parishes) who have worked extremely hard for the success of the retreats while continuing to improve ACTS through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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