



# **POLICY COMMITTEE**

## **Position Paper**

# **REVIEW OF CLOISTER AS IT APPLIES TO THE TRES DIAS WEEKEND**

**ORIGINAL DATE:** March 11, 2017

- Revised October 01, 2017 (The Closing)

- Revised May 3, 2019 (Serenade & Mananita)

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## **CLOISTER IS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF A TRES DIAS WEEKEND!**

Over the years there have been many questions, conversations and misunderstandings concerning how the concept of CLOISTER as recorded in the Essentials applies to a Tres Dias weekend. Because of this, the Policy Committee of the Tres Dias International Secretariat has undertaken to create this document of “Best Practices” which we encourage each community to prayerfully consider as they determine their own policies.

**IMPORTANT:** *You’ll note that in most cases the decisions are recommendations (“should,” “may,” etc), but in some cases they are presented as rules (“must,” “shall,” etc).*

### **BACKGROUND:**

- As it will become apparent, the Essentials do not provide a lot of details concerning the application of Cloister, so it’s necessary for us to extrapolate the PRINCIPLES of the Essentials as we apply them to each issue that is raised. The following excerpts from the appropriate Tres Dias documents were utilized in our decision making:
  - **PREAMBLE TO THE ESSENTIALS:** Makes reference to the three aspects of Christian Growth (Piety/Study/Action) stating “... *These three aspects of Christian growth are stressed in the cloistered environment called, “the weekend.”*”
  - **ESSENTIALS 3.2.10:** *“That the team and Candidates live in a cloistered environment for the entire weekend.”*
  - **TRES DIAS GLOSSARY OF TERMS:** *“Cloistered Environment: An essential feature of each weekend is that it be a time of focus and concentration on the Lord’s teachings for both candidates and the team members. A cloister (from the Latin, *claustrum*, meaning an “enclosed space”) was that part of the monastery that the general public could not enter. As far as physical facilities permit, weekends are held in a cloistered (enclosed) space where team and candidates are insulated from the pressures of everyday life and distractions of the outside world. The rollo room should be completely cloistered, with the wearing of watches and use of telephones, PDAs and other electronic devices that allow intrusion from the outside world strongly discouraged.”*

**PRINCIPLES:** Based on these documents, the Policy Committee agreed on the following principles to guide in our decision-making concerning the concept of cloister on a weekend:

- 1) The underlying truth that we “Strive for the Ideal but we live in the Reality.”
- 2) The primary differentiation of interactions from non-team members that determine whether or not the cloister is being violated is if there is direct or personal

communication with the candidates on anything other than at a very superficial level.

- 3) All team members and candidates shall remain at the facility for the entire weekend and no one, including Spiritual Directors, shall be given permission to leave and return. Barring emergencies, the only exception would be an Auxiliary/Cha/Angel who is required to obtain supplies, etc., as part of their role.
  - a. Obviously some exceptions are reasonable when related to the bonafide medical needs of a candidate/pilgrim or a team member. But they must truly be validated emergency exceptions.
- 4) No one should be permitted to join the weekend after the chapel visit on Thursday evening.
- 5) Radios and TV's shall be prohibited on the weekend. (Finding out the score of an NFL playoff game on a smart phone is bad enough, but it's not the same as sitting in front of a TV watching the game!)
- 6) We must honor the candidates' "Right to self-determination" as per the Essentials 3.2.22. The candidates are adults and therefore shall not be manipulated, coerced or in any other way forced to comply with our directives against their will. (Obviously if a candidate is causing a distraction to others or is in any way impacting the cloister and/or general experience of other candidates, they can and should be asked to leave the weekend if no other options are available).
- 7) We know from our own experiences that there are times when the inability to make contact with the outside world causes stress that, in itself, distracts from the candidate's own cloister and ability to fully engage emotionally and spiritually in the activities of the weekends:
  - a. This can be something as seemingly innocuous as the results of an NFL play-off game, to perhaps the need to communicate with a loved one at home or the status of an important business event.
  - b. Although we would prefer that these types of communications not occur, the lesser of two evils would be to allow the candidate to make the necessary connections; provided it is done in private, is kept to a minimum, and does not in any way distract others.

Based on the above, the Policy Committee provides the following BEST PRACTICES for our communities in regard to honoring the Cloister.

## **CLOISTER AS IT PERTAINS TO THE CLOSING**

As a result of a Proxy Vote via Special Assembly, October, 2017, the following revision to Section 3.2.10 of the Essentials was approved unanimously by the voting communities:

**OLD:** *“That the team and candidates live in a cloistered environment for the entire weekend.”*

**NEW:** *“That the team and candidates live in a cloistered environment for the weekend. The cloister starts at the Rector Introduction and ends after the Apostolic Hour or before the Closing.”*

Effective October 01, 2017, it is no longer necessary for the Closing to be considered as part of the weekend cloister. As such, each local Secretariat is encouraged to develop their own policies and procedures relative to activities related to the Closing as well as who is permitted to attend.

We would, however, point you to Section 3.2.26 of the Essentials which states *“That the Closing be as well prepared as other activities of the weekend.”*

Page revision: October 01, 2017

## CLOISTER AND THE USE OF 'KITCHEN PALANCA' TO SERVE MEALS

There are basically two team models within Tres Dias:

- 1) Large Teams (+/- 80-120)
- 2) Small Teams (+/- 22-30)
- 3) And of course various hybrid combinations of the two

Communities that utilize the "Large Team" model generally consider the entire facility to be cloistered, so other than the Serenade or Mananita, non-team members are not permitted to take any sort of active role on a weekend, and in many cases are not permitted into the facility. This team model is generally self-sufficient with adequate staff for meal preparation, serving, clean up, palanca, chapel prep, etc.

Communities that utilize the "small team" model generally have to share the facility with other groups so, by necessity, consider the cloister to apply solely to the Rollo Room and Chapel. They are also often impacted by the size of the facility; necessitating smaller teams. This model requires Pescadores (non-team members) to sign up ahead of time to help serve the team and candidates each meal; these volunteer positions are often referred to as "Kitchen Palanca." There are generally about 4-12 of these volunteers for each meal. They arrive prior to the meal to help with the set up. They serve the meals as a waiter/waitress would; limiting their involvement with team and candidates to basic questions such as "Would you like tea, water or coffee?" "Would you like more potatoes?" etc. They are admonished to NOT have any sort of conversation with the team and candidates. They usually stay on-site after the candidates leave the dining area so they can help with the clean-up and re-set the tables. The only formal exposure that is permitted is that, at the end of the meal, they are given the opportunity to give their name, church, hometown, when they made their original weekend and its number.

Both of these team models have been in practice since the earliest days of Tres Dias and there is no "right or wrong" model, as long as the Essentials and their principles are upheld.

***POLICY POSITION: The position of the Policy Committee is that the use of Kitchen Palanca volunteers does NOT negatively impact the concept of the cloister and is an acceptable practice. To be in compliance, the following are caveats that must be adhered to:***

- 1) The communities that utilize this practice must train and monitor the Palanca Volunteers about the need to avoid any sort of personal communication or physical contact with the candidates and team.***
- 2) Spouses or other family members of candidates shall not be permitted to serve meals, since that could create a distraction for the candidate; thus violating cloister.***
- 3) Any other restrictions are left to the local community to determine.***

## CLOISTER AS IT PERTAINS TO SERENADE/MANANITA

Most communities utilize a number of non-Essential activities in the course of their weekends. The most universal of these, besides written palanca, include the Serenade (usually Saturday evening) or the Mananita (usually Sunday Morning). Both of these activities date back to the earliest of weekends.

Although the actual process for each of these activities is different, what they have in common is that Pescadores of the opposite sex from the local community gather at the facility and sing, as a form of encouragement, to the team and candidates. There is no personal contact or communication between the participants and the team or candidates.

***POLICY POSITION: The position of the Policy Committee is that the Serenade and Mananita, in reality, are violations of the Cloister. However, since these activities date back to the earliest of weekends and are utilized in virtually all communities, we feel it would do damage to the ministry to prohibit them at this late date. As such, we are providing an exception for these two activities; noting that as long as they do not include any sort of personal communication or interaction with the candidates, we will acknowledge for the record that they do NOT negatively impact the concept of the cloister and are acceptable practices. The only caveats that we insist on are:***

- ***The local communities must make certain that procedures are in place to avoid any sort of personal conversation or touching between the participants and the team or candidates.***
- ***Non-Pescadores shall not be involved in a Serenade or Mananita.***
- ***That the activities involved in the Serenade and Mananita not be expanded beyond what has been traditionally accepted as normal. In other words, although we are not prohibiting them from being practiced, we do not want to see their focus or usage expanded.***

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**Page revision (May 3, 2019):** When we debated this topic in 2017, our unanimous opinion was that the Mananita and Serenade were, indeed, violations of the Cloister but we agreed to provide an exception since both practices have been in place from the earliest of weekends. We opted not to include that reasoning in the Position Paper, but hindsight has shown us that this was a mistake. As such the Policy Committee has voted to revise this page to include that verbiage in order to provide better context to the communities.

## **CLOISTER AS IT PERTAINS TO SPECIAL MUSIC ON THE WEEKEND**

A common practice among many communities is “Special Music” being provided by non-team members (and occasionally even by non-pescadores). The question sometimes arises as to whether or not this is a violation of the Essentials; particularly the cloister.

***POLICY POSITION: Generally, special music should be discouraged. However, as long as the local community takes the responsibility to maintain the following guidelines, the Policy Committee does not view Special Music as a violation of the Essentials:***

- ***There shall be no personal communication between the musicians and the team or candidates;***
- ***The musicians must be Pescadores;***
- ***Special music can only be permitted during meal times.***
- ***Their entire role is to provide music. It shall not become a focused ministry, it should be fairly brief, and there shall absolutely not be any preaching, teaching or sermonizing.***



## **CLOISTER AS IT PERTAINS TO THE SPOUSAL TALK (RECTOR'S ROLLO: 'LIVING THE 4<sup>th</sup> DAY')**

**HISTORY:** According to the Essentials, the last Rollo of the weekend, "Living the 4<sup>th</sup> Day," is given by the Rector, usually on Sunday afternoon. By historical precedence, the Rector's spouse is often invited to share his/her insights concerning the 4<sup>th</sup> Day. To adequately address this, and the impact on Cloister, it's necessary to look at the history of this practice since it's not covered by the Essentials or even within the Outline of the Rollo itself.

The original purpose, and as it is still currently practiced in many communities, was for the male rector's wife to give a brief overview to the candidates of what not to do when they return home later that evening. One example that comes to mind was the wife explaining her interaction with her husband when he returned home from his weekend: She had missed him and was feeling somewhat amorous; anxiously awaiting his arrival. She went on to explain how turned-off she became to the idea of Tres Dias when her husband, rather than responding to her romantic overtures, stated something like: "Honey, I've missed you. This was a wonderful weekend so now let's go and pray for your weekend!!"

You get the idea - the short talk (+/- 5 minutes) is given on the men's weekend solely to explain that their wives haven't been part of the weekend, so to be understanding if they don't seem enthusiastic and to avoid being over-bearing.

Over the years, this practice seems to have taken on a life of its own in a number of communities; where the spouse of both the male and female rectors come in to give a presentation alongside the Rector – and in some cases, going on to give mini-rollos that last longer than the Rector's rollo; and sometimes covering topics that are well outside of the outline for the Rollo.

This is an example of allowing a perfectly reasonable exception to grow out of proportion. And now that this has become such a long-standing tradition in many communities, it may be very difficult to "put the genie back into the bottle." However, to be faithful to the Essentials, we must make the effort.

**POLICY POSITION:** The spousal talk is not essential to the weekend. However, recognizing that according to scripture the husband and wife are "One Flesh," the Policy Committee deems it acceptable for a rector to include his or her spouse in the 4<sup>th</sup> day talk subject to the following requirements:

- 1) This exception only applies to the Rector's spouse!
- 2) The subject matter must be limited to information listed under Section II in the "Living the 4<sup>th</sup> Day" Outline titled: "WHAT TO SHARE REGARDING YOUR TRES DIAS WEEKEND."

- 3) The spouse's presentation as well as the Rector's portion must be critiqued by the team as part of the critique of the rollo.**
- 4) This presentation shall not exceed 5 minutes of the allotted time for the rollo, and the presentation shall not cause the rollo to exceed its allotted time as noted in the "Purpose and Situation" of the Rollo.**

## **CLOISTER AS IT PERTAINS TO THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES ON A WEEKEND**

Most communities have been struggling with creating policies to address the use of smart phones, laptops, tablets, etc., as they attempt to maintain the principles of cloister, so the committee has undertaken to create a list of Best Practices. We feel there are a number of very important, and sometimes conflicting realities that need to be considered as we come to a decision:

- a. The reality that, in this age of technology, many Christians – and not just Millennials - opt to utilize these devices in lieu of paper. This includes taking notes during classes or sermons, reading and studying scripture, and even as their preferred means of communication and entertainment. During their sermons, many pastors encourage their congregation to “open your bible or smart phone to this passage...” To them it’s as normal to use a smart phone or tablet as it was in earlier generations to use pen, paper and wristwatch.
- b. Another reality is that the focus of the Tres Dias Movement is to reach Christians who desire a closer relationship with Jesus; encouraging them to return to their local church and environments as leaders for Christ. Given this reality, along with the assumption that candidates on a weekend have been properly selected and prepared, it would seem reasonable to insist that they leave their ‘gadgets’ behind in order to spend the time focusing on what is happening “in the moment” without the distractions of technology.
- c. As noted in the beginning of this document, candidates are adults and therefore cannot and shall not be manipulated, coerced or in any other way forced to comply with our directives against their will (unless, of course, it creates a distraction for others). In addition, Section 3.2.22 of the Essentials instructs us to honor a candidate’s right to self-determination.
- d. It was fairly easy to maintain cloister in the earlier generations of Tres Dias: Place an “out of order” sign on a pay phone, cover any clocks, and instruct team and candidates to remove their wristwatches (although we know that many kept their watches in their pockets anyway!!). Unfortunately, in today’s generation of Tres Dias candidates, it’s just not that simple. Today, many people, including Christians, have an addiction to their cell phones and other devices. In fact, there’s a term for this addiction: “Nomophobia” and some are even considering including it in the DSM 5 guidelines.
  - a. And it goes without saying that in the vast majority of cases, Tres Dias is not the place to force someone to deal with an addiction.

Given the above realities, it’s important that the Policy Committee create specific parameters and Best Practices to guide the communities as they develop their own policies related to the issue of electronic devices on a weekend.

**SUMMARY:** As we stated at the beginning of this document, we “strive for the ideal but we live in the reality” and this section on electronic devices is a perfect example. We lament that events in the last decade(s) have progressed to the point that our understanding of cloister has been impinged by the proliferation of various technologies; requiring us to address this issue.

Because of the complexity, and the awareness that different regions and environments will shape how a community best responds, we do not feel led as a committee to impose strict policy directives on the use of “gadgets” (smart phones, laptops, tablets, etc).

However, while clearly upholding the principles of the cloister, it’s important that we not become legalistic in its application. In addition, we encourage each community to seriously consider this topic and avoid simply passing a rule to in order to sidestep the issue.

***POLICY POSITION: We feel it would be counter-productive to impose an outright ban on these devices; opting instead for education and communication. As long as community leadership pays very close attention to what is meant by ‘Cloister’ and understands the above parameters, we prefer to leave it to the judgment of the local leadership to develop their own policies that would be reflective of their own region. We recommend that devices be permitted on a weekend but in as controlled a manner as possible by using the Best Practices listed below.***

Keep in mind also that there is truly no way to prevent someone from “smuggling” in a phone and making contact with the outside world, so it’s counter-productive to make rules completely prohibiting them. However, if a candidate insists on persistent cell phone use, it would seem to raise the question as to whether this is the right weekend for that candidate. Of course if that use negatively impacts others, such use shall not be permitted and the candidate should be requested to leave the weekend.

Having said that, here is a list of ‘Best Practices’ that we strongly recommend as it pertains to the issue of electronic devices:

- a. Modify the Rector’s introductory comments on Thursday evening to include teaching on the following:
  - i. A clear explanation as to the reason why we strongly encourage people NOT to use their cell phones, laptops, tablets or other electronic devices to contact others. (Most adults will respond to requests when the rationale is explained, rather than when presented as a blanket rule).
  - ii. Ask the candidates to seriously consider committing the next 72 hours to focus on their relationship with the Lord and to try to hear what He may be saying, without the distraction of the outside world.
  - iii. Reassure the candidates that they will be notified immediately if there are any emergency communications of which they need to be made aware.

- b. Educate sponsors so they will be able to encourage their candidates to leave their devices at home. Make certain they understand the reasons why this is an important consideration so they can educate the candidate.
- c. Make it a firm rule that cell phones are not to be used for phone calls in the presence of other weekend participants. Again, explain the reason for this.
- d. Teach the team and candidates about the importance of cloister and of not letting the outside world pull them away from what the Lord has for them.
  - i. Team members should be advised that they are expected to be a good example for the candidates and should strictly honor the cloister.
- e. Make it a firm rule that team members are, at no time, to use their phones in the presence of candidates. (This should be stressed throughout the team meetings since they need to set a good example).
- f. The local community should provide Weekend Leadership with firm guidelines to follow when they encounter a candidate who is unable or unwilling to comply, and/or is being a distraction to other candidates.

**As a service to the local communities, we are pleased to provide the following as a sample script. Please feel free to use or modify this as you wish:**

**RECTOR'S INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS ON THURSDAY EVENING CONCERNING THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

*Most of us are so attached to our devices and being distracted every moment with email, Facebook, Twitter, texting, etc that we have forgotten how to just live in the moment, and rest! When we're out in the world, we're pretty much available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to almost anyone who wants to reach us. What I'm asking you to do this weekend is put those things aside and spend the next 3 days insulated from the world.*

*If you've brought any electronic devices with you (cell phone, laptop, tablet, etc), I'm going to ask you to turn them off and put them away.*

*While you're here, you won't need to worry about the time because the auxiliaries/chas will keep you on schedule. And if there's any sort of emergency, I promise you'll be promptly notified.*

*The important thing to keep in mind is that the world will very likely get along just fine without you, and your Facebook friends will probably not unfriend you because you've signed off for a few days.*

*Take these three days to step away from world and enjoy the silence. The world has so much noise going on that we have forgotten how to be still and to just listen. I know it will be hard, but I promise you that it will be worth it – there is freedom in just being – and experiencing God without the noise and distractions of the world.*

*Out of consideration of the others attending the weekend, please comply with this request.*

## USE OF VIDEO PRESENTATIONS ON A WEEKEND

The use of video presentations during a weekend seems to have become commonplace in some communities. This requires a review and analysis to determine if these are in compliance with the Essentials; including the topic of Cloister. There appears to be two primary uses for video presentations:

- 1) Short videos are used as an introduction to each rollo in an effort to create an environment to help the candidates/pilgrims to focus on the upcoming talk. These videos are compatible with the content of the rollo to follow.
- 2) Videos that are used during other times in the weekend which the rector and/or Secretariat feel enhances some aspect of the weekend; sometimes with content that is not in keeping with the flow of the weekend. These are sometimes used as “time killers” while waiting for the next scheduled event.

Before stating our position, we would like to review the guiding principles that we believe must be considered when evaluating the role of videos on a weekend; understanding that this technology was not readily available in 1980 when the Essentials were written, so they were never addressed in that document.

- 1) We need to examine the content of the video, its placement within the weekend, and its impact on the “flow” of the weekend.
  - a. The entire Tres Dias experience is designed to bring the candidates from a common starting point on Thursday evening, which then progresses in intensity and focus (head to heart) throughout the weekend; with each Rollo and activity building on the previous one. The goal is to enable the candidates to gain the necessary insights, at their own pace without external stimulation or manipulation; permitting the Holy Spirit to speak to each Candidate as He sees fit.
    - i. For instance, Thursday evening starts with an introduction by the Rector, followed by the “Know Thyself” meditation, which leads into the overnight silence. This is designed to be a fairly quiet period of time for breaking away from the world, becoming acclimated to this new environment, and for encouraging self-introspection in preparation for the weekend. Having a video at that time, particularly one that is loud and energetic, takes away from that focus of self-reflection.
    - ii. Keep in mind that we don’t even discuss God until AFTER the Ideals Rollo on Friday morning. So to have a presentation glorifying the virtues of God before then would seriously violate that progression.

- iii. The same can be said for the progression of each following rollo. For instance, a video that focuses on Christian missionary outreaches before the Action and/or CCIA Rollo would be out of order.
- 2) In addition, regardless of where it is placed in the weekend, if a video is a self-contained sermon, teaching, or even a skit that encompasses a teaching or concept that is outside of the subject content of the 15 rollos could be considered a “16<sup>th</sup> Rollo” and would be a violation of the Essentials.
- 3) A video teaching from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party would be an intrusion into the weekend by an “outsider” and would likely violate the principles of the cloister.

**SUMMARY:** One of the most important aspects of a Tres Dias weekend is the development of relationships between the participants. This human contact becomes even more important in this impersonal age of “digital relationships,” so every effort should be made throughout the weekend to encourage these personal interactions. The addition of distractions such as the use of videos, excessive use of skits, presentations and performances to fill in free time all serve to reduce the ability to develop these important relationships. Our goal should be to increase the amount of focused “down time” rather than filling in the time with superfluous activities. However, only those activities which violate the principles of the Essentials can be prohibited. All other activities are, by necessity, left to the wisdom and discretion of the local communities.

**POLICY POSITION CONCERNING THE USE OF VIDEOS ON A WEEKEND:**

- 1) It is **strongly recommended** for the reasons noted above that video presentations **NOT** be used during a Tres Dias weekend.
- 2) The following types of video presentations are **prohibited** from being used on a Tres Dias weekend:
  - a. Those that include any sort of formal teaching or preaching, whether by pastors, evangelists, missionaries, Christian entertainers, etc.
  - b. Those that are designed as entertaining skits if they include content that is not in keeping within the current flow of the weekend, as described above.
  - c. Those that utilize current events in any manner are a violation of the cloister.



## SUMMARY

We understand that these recommendations will not satisfy everyone, but they truly are our best effort to “strive for the ideal while living in reality.”

Thank you for your desire to keep your community’s policies and practices in-line with the Essentials and with the Tres Dias Method. If you have any questions or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact any Policy Committee Member or the Policy Committee Chair by email at [policychair@tresdias.org](mailto:policychair@tresdias.org).

Respectfully submitted,

*Jeff Mehl*

Jeffrey Mehl  
Policy Committee Chair

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

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