

What May I Share with a Prospective Pilgrim About the Walk to Emmaus?

What is the Walk to Emmaus®?

[We] were reminded that Emmaus® is not an “emotional bubble-bath.” It is essentially a journey with Jesus Christ. The main focus is not how wonderfully close we [the participants] have grown with each other, but how much closer we are to Christ and how much more effective we are [or will be] as servants in his church.

— clergyman from Illinois

The Walk to Emmaus® is a spiritual renewal program intended to strengthen the local church through the development of Christian disciples and leaders. The Walk to Emmaus® experience begins with a 72-hour short course in Christianity, comprised of fifteen talks by lay and clergy on the themes of God’s grace, disciplines of Christian discipleship, and what it means to be the church. The course is wrapped in prayer and meditation, special times of worship, and daily celebration of Holy Communion. The “Emmaus® community,” made up of those who have attended an Emmaus® weekend, support the 72-hour experience with a prayer vigil, [in some communities] by preparing and serving meals, and other acts of love and self-giving. The Emmaus® Walk usually begins Thursday evening and concludes Sunday evening. Men and women attend separate weekends.

During and after the three days, Emmaus® leaders encourage participants to meet regularly in small groups. The members of the small groups challenge and support one another in faithful living. Participants seek to Christianize their environments of family, job, and community through the ministry of their congregations.

The Upper Room® of The United Methodist Church sponsors the Walk to Emmaus® and offers it through local Emmaus® groups around the world. The three-day Emmaus® experience and the follow-up groups strengthen and renew Christian people as disciples of

Jesus Christ and as active members of the body of Christ in mission to the world.

Many church leaders acclaim Emmaus® as much more than a program. It is a powerful movement of spiritual renewal that is making a difference for countless individuals and many congregations. Between 1978–1995, nearly half a million persons participated in Emmaus®. During this same period, the Emmaus® movement has taken hold in 300 sites around the world.

Emmaus® is an experience in which growing Christians of all sorts come together in common affirmation of the essentials of the Christian faith.

What is the Aim of the Walk to Emmaus?

The aim of Emmaus® is to inspire, challenge, and equip local church members for Christian action in their homes, churches, workplaces, and communities. Several important components of the Emmaus® program work together to accomplish this aim. Several dimensions of Christian piety, study and action are covered in the Weekend.

The three-day Emmaus® course in Christianity moves church members to new levels of openness and commitment as disciples of Christ. People re-experience the gift of God’s love and emerge from the Emmaus® weekend with a desire to pass that love on to others. The three-day course strengthens persons’ conscious union with Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God’s grace, truth, and compassion.

The Emmaus® weekend gives participants an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their faith in God, to receive the transforming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to relate closely with other persons who are seeking a deeper faith, and to rededicate their lives as members of the body of Christ called to ministry in the world.

Local church involvement is an outgrowth of Emmaus®. Though involvement in Emmaus® activities can be fun and satisfying, Emmaus

achieves its aim only when local churches gain strength; and people become active members of the body of Christ, sharing the love of God in homes, workplaces, and communities around the world. Participation and service in all aspects of Emmaus® — the three-day short course, follow-up groups, and team and background support — are designed to empower and equip Christians to effectively be Christ's hands and feet in the world.

What happens during the Three-Day Emmaus® Experience?

In small table groups, participants listen, take notes, and discuss each theme that is presented. Participants will hear fifteen talks, five by clergy and 10 by lay team members. Each of these talks covers one dimension of a short course in Christianity. While the Emmaus® Walk is fun and rejuvenating, it is also concentrated and full.

The three days have distinct phases and reflect a Trinitarian framework. The focus of Day One is **God** and the relationship God offers. The focus of Day Two is **Jesus Christ** and each disciple's response to the grace of God in the context of Christian community. The focus of Day Three is **the Holy Spirit** and the call to live as an active member of the body of Christ through service in church and community. All three days point to the Fourth Day — living every day as a walk with Christ in the company of one another, through a lifestyle of regular prayer, study, and service.

A moment of silent reflection, then discussion and creative responses follow each of the fifteen talks. The services of worship and daily prayer are thematic and are designed especially for the Emmaus® Walk. Each day includes break times and snacks. The three days as a whole are embraced by prayer and signs of the sacrificial service on the part of many who help make each Walk happen.

What should your potential Participant know before attending?

Emmaus® is designed for active church members and their active Christians who want to

rekindle their faith or renew their vision. Less-active church members who are seeking to renew a relationship with God, to grow spiritually, or to discover firmer foundations for their lives may benefit from Emmaus® also. However, Emmaus® is **not** an evangelistic outreach to non-Christians.

Emmaus® is for building faith and discipleship, **not** for working through grief or psychological problems. Emmaus® teams are not trained for counseling or group therapy. If a potential participant tends toward preoccupation with working through personal dilemmas, she/he should consider waiting to go to Emmaus® when she/he feels freer to focus on the message of the Walk.

Emmaus® is for fostering unity in Christ, not for theological debate and arguments about denominations. Emmaus® tries to foster appreciation and openness to the different faith-perspectives of the participants. Bring a spirit of Christian tolerance and charity toward others, including members of other denominations. If one cannot affirm her/his unity with other kinds of Christians, if she/he tends to define Christianity narrowly and legalistically or are intolerant of those who see things differently, then Emmaus® is probably not for this person.

Emmaus® is a concentrated three-day course in Christianity — not a relaxing retreat. Participants should not bring work from the office or have hopes of taking an afternoon off to read. Except for break times, Emmaus® is a very full experience. A participant should come with empty hands and open hearts, planning to give herself or himself completely to the Emmaus® Walk.



File: Fourth Day Summary of Emmaus