**History of the Walk to Emmaus**

The Upper Room Emmaus Movement has its ancestry in the Roman Catholic Cursillo. In Spanish, “Cursillo” is a very common word, derived from “Curso,” which means “little course,” something that is done in a few days rather than in weeks or months. The term Cursillo connotes the idea of *intensity,* of doing a great deal in a very little time.

Cursillo began on the island of Majorca, some 170 miles southwest of the mainland of Spain, sometime in the late 1940’s. During the period of 1936-1939, Spain had been involved in a bitter Civil War, followed by World War II; years of unsettled *conditions*. The desire for church renewal and inspiration for the life of the Apostolate grew out of these nine years of much stress within the country. Throughout Spain and in the twenty Republics of Latin America the “Young Men’s Branch of the Catholic Action,” similar to the Episcopal Youth Organization, Catholic Youth Organization, and the United Methodist Youth Fellowship, planned a pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. James de Compostela at Santiago Spain. To prepare for this, the Catholic Action Leaders on Majorca formed Leaders’ Schools in which they gave short courses to prepare for this pilgrimage.

The leaders of the Catholic Action group called the courses Cursillos, in part because this term is not essentially a religious one; and in Spain and Majorca there was a strong laity of militant independence almost to the point of being anti-clerical. Therefore, these courses were designed not to be overly pious.

As the leaders of these early Cursillos refined their curses, which were designed for small groups, they found that they were attracting young men who were not active in Catholic Action and had no desire to be. They wanted to be part of the Cursillo and pilgrimage. The early Cursillos were 6-7 days long and were held during special occasions (festivals or Saint Weeks), but gradually they were shortened to 3-4 days. The talks were “Youth Catholic Action,” “The Leaders Profile” and included clerical talks like “The Church” and “The Mystical Body of Christ.” In time, these Cursillos evolved into Cursillos de Christiandad – short courses in Christianity somewhat as they are today.

Cursillo could not be contained, and it continued to flourish. A National Secretariat was formed and received Papal approval in 1963. The movement grew to a shared clerical and lay directed movement, which essentially it is today.

In 1956, Cursillo was brought to the United States by two Spanish Air Cadets who were studying at Lackland Air Force Base at San Antonio, Texas. The format of the three days and the talks were translated into English in Texas in the late 1950’s and early ‘60’s. The Roman Catholic English Cursillos started the Cursillo with their brothers and sisters in Christ – Episcopal, Lutheran and the United Methodist Church in Peroria, Illinois and Nashville, Tennessee. The United Methodist Church began its expression of Cursillo in about 1977 and called it the Upper Room Cursillo.

This came about after several members of the staff of The Upper Room in Nashville attended a Lutheran Cursillo in Miami, Florida, and it was decided to actively consider this spiritual formation ministry for the United Methodist Church. At the same time, Rev. Robert R. Wood who had been involved in the Roman Catholic Cursillo was serving a United Methodist Church in Peoria, Illinois. This was a strong ecumenical Cursillo, and Bod served on several teams (\*To date, he estimates that about 500 members of this church have attended Cursillo and Emmaus weekends). The decision was made to develop a United Methodist model at Peoria where Bob would be the Spiritual Director for the first weekends. After the first two model weekend in April and May, 1977, he was invited to join the national staff and work in its final development.

In the beginning, it was prayerfully hoped that the Upper Room Cursillo could be a part of the regular Curisillo movement. A general agreement was worked out whereby the United Methodists could use the term Cursillo and be a part of the Cursillo family. During two years of this relationship, the United Methodist movement grew along ecumenical lines. However, in 1981, by mutual agreement between the National Secretariat of the Roman Catholic Cursilo Movement and The Upper Room, the Emmaus movement was given its name. Thus, began the life of the Upper Room Emmaus movement in equipping knowledgeable church leaders with a vital piety.

By 1984, The Upper Room Emmaus Movement had established communities in fourth-four “free-world” communities and in nine correctional institutions. On several occasions, Emmaus communities have cooperated with Kairos, a prison Cursillo-type ministry. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 persons had attended a Walk to Emmaus weekend by 1984.

In the fall of 1984, the Walk to Emmaus was taken to Australia and shared with leaders of the Uniting Church and became an international movement.

The Upper Room philosophically is committed to ecumenical efforts. Therefore, although Emmaus is under the jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church, it is supported and attended by persons of all denominations. The over-all content and techniques are the same as those in the Cursillo communities; and the Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran churches have continued their strong and loving support.

The Emmaus Movement is lodged in The Upper Room, a section of the Board of Discipleship in the United Methodist Church headquarters in Nashville. The Board of Discipleship is responsible for enabling programming in the local church. The Upper Room is responsible for the spiritual life of the local congregations; and therefore, it is natural for it to be responsible for Emmaus.

There is an Advisory Committee composed of one clergy and one lay person from each area in which the Emmaus Movement is active. Annual meetings are held the third week of July at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, concurrent with the Prayer and Bible Conference sponsored by The Upper Room. This is a time for spiritual renewal, workshops and consideration of matters of common interest.

The goal of Emmaus, like Cursillo, is to make Christian communities possible in neighborhoods, churches, work situations and all other places where people live the greater part of their lives. It attempts to make it possible for anyone to live a Christian life in a natural way. It attempts to put a renewed meaning and add a boldness to the most important proclamation that anyone will ever make, “I am a Christian.”

\*unsure of the date this was written