

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF THE WALK WITH CHRIST

It was civil war in the 1920s and 1930s, and Spain was divided as anti-Christian forces moved against equally committed Christians. Out of this horrible turmoil has evolved what we have come to know as The Walk with Christ. It's a long and fascinating story that begins in Spain with a small group of dedicated Catholic leaders. They started a five- to six-day Catholic leadership program organized around pilgrimages on festivals and saints' days and designed to revitalize the faith. These retreats were called Cursillos, or "short courses," in Christianity.

In each generation it seems the Holy Spirit raises up people and movements through which the church is reintroduced to the reality of the living God. The Cursillo, Outreach Cursillo, Upper Room Walk to Emmaus, Eastern Washington Walk to Emmaus, and The Walk with Christ have over many years been just such movements of renewal.

"The history of the beginnings of Cursillo is a sacred history. We read with amazement the vitality and growth of Christianity as told in the Acts of the Apostles. Cursillo is a modern version of the Acts. In their study and prayer for finding a way to make a difference in the world of their day, the founders of Cursillo were looking for a way to change the world. They said to themselves, 'If the first Christians succeeded in changing the pagan world in which they lived, we can change ours using the same means. Let us go back to charity between us and recapture the same enthusiasm in the service of Christ.'" (LAY DIRECTOR MANUAL, Rev.2003. "Appendix D," "History of Emmaus," p. 81)

By 1943 this early, six-day Cursillo model was changed to a three-day format, thereby better accommodating pilgrims' availability to attend. By 1949, Cursillos were opened to people outside this small Catholic group, and in 1957 the first American Cursillo occurred. A Catholic priest and two Spanish airmen stationed in Waco, Texas, decided to offer a Cursillo, in Spanish. Little did they know how great an impact this first Cursillo would have in the years to come.

Soon other brothers and sisters in Christ were invited, but not without some controversy. The Catholic Church allowed the Spokane Diocese of the Episcopal Church to begin offering an Episcopal version of the Cursillo, and it flourished. However, it was soon dictated by the Episcopal Church's policies that no more than 20% of the participants involved in these Cursillos could be non-Episcopalian. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit proved to be unrestrained by this ruling and members of several different denominations attended Outreach Cursillos, thereby continuing the ecumenical focus. Obviously, this severely influenced what was to happen next.

Glennys Carlisle noticed that there was a definite change in her co-worker, Gabe Joseph, and that he was wearing a unique cross after a weekend retreat in 1975. Gabe had just spent that weekend at an Episcopal Outreach Cursillo. Having seen the glow and excitement in Gabe, Glennys was excited to be a part of such a Cursillo with her husband, Frank. They each attended one that year and then worked on several Episcopal Cursillo teams. These early pilgrims helped to organize and lead the first Eastern Washington Outreach Cursillo at Pioneer

United Methodist Church in Walla Walla, in 1979. This was the start of the Eastern Washington Walk movement, which continued to encourage the crossing of denominational lines as the movement rapidly grew.

In 1981, however, the National Office of the Cursillo Movement became more and more uncomfortable with the ecumenical stance being taken by these new outreach groups. Faced with the threat of a lawsuit if they used any of the copyrighted materials from the Cursillo, some members of the Eastern Washington movement met with representatives of other groups from around the nation. They agreed to band together and to change the name from Cursillo to the Upper Room Walk to Emmaus, under the auspices of the Upper Room, an office of the national Methodist Church. Soon thereafter, with the freedom to grow, the Upper Room Walk to Emmaus became an international movement involving groups in Mexico, Australia, Brazil, and Canada.

It wasn't long, though, before trouble again loomed on the horizon. The Walk's strong ecumenical character continued to attract a unique blend of Christians to worship Christ during these special weekends. In 2002, the Upper Room Walk to Emmaus moved to make the Walk essentially a Methodist organization by rendering it less ecumenical and by putting pressure on the Eastern Washington group and others around the country to do likewise if they wanted to remain with the Upper Room. Failure to comply with this narrowing denominational focus led, in 2005, to an ultimatum: the Eastern Washington community was either to conform to the Upper Room model or to leave the Upper Room Walk to Emmaus. Compliance would have necessitated abandoning the Catholic tradition of the Way of the Cross, Mananitas, the use of Spanish songs, two talks (already deleted as a fruitless concession), and the Episcopalian tradition of the Agape Feast. The members of the community voted almost unanimously (over 95%) to leave the Upper Room Walk to Emmaus but expected to be able to keep the name, Eastern Washington Walk to Emmaus, and the above traditions. However, again confronted by the Upper Room with litigation, the Eastern Washington Walk to Emmaus name was dropped and a new name, The Walk with Christ, was adopted. This separation allowed the newly named group to continue its focus on ecumenical participation while maintaining the same format, traditions, and integrity of the rich and consistent Cursillo/Walk traditions.

To have withstood the many challenges and changes that have occurred over all these years and to have continued to be a powerful tool of God all the while is a truly remarkable accomplishment. Even more astounding is the fact that the talks (or, in Spanish, "rollos") presented over the years have remained the same and are presented even in the same order! What a testimony to God's mighty hand it is to see that the Walk's continued good work is still true and faithful to His plan. In spite of the many changes the movement has endured, often without any 'official' direction, Christ kept things consistent, offering a constant blessing. Many lives have been changed as thousands of pilgrims have participated in this laity-driven movement, an 'Acts' type miracle under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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