

## **In the Beginning...**

### **LEAP OF faith**

#### **“Walk to Emmaus takes participants on spiritual renewal with lifetime benefits”**

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By Cheryl Sherry

Post Crescent staff writer

“Other people” go on mission trips, serve breakfast once a month to those in need and live their faith out loud. People who attend the Walk to Emmaus, a 72-hour spiritual retreat, often times become those “other people.”

The walk to Emmaus (pronounced eh-may-us) allows participants to leave everything hard and heavy on their mind behind and be filled up with the Holy Spirit, said Jean Johnson Green, assistant director of the Walk to Emmaus, based at Upper Room Ministries in Nashville. “The Walk to Emmaus builds a fire under you and sends you back to your church ready to serve and be committed to Christ in a stronger way than you’ve ever been before.”

Because of the efforts of Brad and Jill Zimanek of Appleton, that experience is coming to the Fox Valley in April. The spiritual renewal program will be held April 12-15 for men and April 19-22 for women at Imago Dei Village near Clintonville. Couples must agree to attend the retreat in tandem.

The Zimaneks attended their walk together in 2002 in Georgia. Although they used to be an Emmaus community in Racine about a decade ago, the couple was disheartened to find their was no longer a Walk in Wisconsin when they moved to Appleton in 2003. Needing 100 people who have previously attended a walk is a requirement to start a new one, the Zimaneks had their work cut out for them.

“I think we originally got it going here for selfish reasons because we loved the Walk to Emmaus and what it did for people’s faith journey,” Jill Zimanek said. “But God reminded me recently we did this for him and his kingdom only, And that’s the greatest reason of all.”

#### **What it is**

The walk to Emmaus was adapted from the Roman Catholic Cursillo (pronounced cur-see-o) movement that originated in Spain and came to the United States in the early 1950’s, Johnson Green said. People who worked at the Upper Room, the ecumenical branch of the United Methodist Church, had attended a Lutheran version of the Cursillo and were blown away by the program they decided to start their own in 1981.

To honor the copyright with Cursillo and remain ecumenical in nature, the Upper Room changed the program to Wesleyan theology and renamed it Walk to Emmaus. Since then nearly 1 million people have taken the walk.

The Walk to Emmaus is a figurative recreation of the walk of the disciples on the first Easter morning. The risen Christ is said to have appeared to two of his disciples who were making the 7-mile trip from

Jerusalem to Emmaus. He wiped away their grief over his death and told them his presence now resided in their hearts.

### **Experiencing 'grace of God'**

Lois Hilger found out about the Walk to Emmaus when she read a newspaper article about the Minnesota Outreach Walk held in May in Clintonville.

"I had been experiencing some tough times and thought from reading this article that this would be helpful to me," the Appleton woman said.

"What I experienced: 72 hours of pure agape love. ...It is truly a basic course in Christianity that is fulfilling, inspiring and makes you think about your relationship to Christ."

"I think too often we go on to college and develop our other intelligences, but spiritually we are content with where we were in middle school."

Bruce Miller of Appleton serves as the lay director of the April men's walk. Miller attended his walk in 1986 in Dallas after seeing his own pastor's journey. The grandson of a Lutheran pastor, he had left the church for 20 years and renewed his faith when he moved to Texas two years earlier.

"It was an interesting trip through the 72 hours – like how God pursues you even when you are not looking," Miller said. "He pursued me 20 years and he got me; I wasn't looking for him."

By the end of the first night, Miller said he was ready to go home because he felt his faith didn't compare with those around him. Convinced to stay, by the time it was over, he "was on fire. I was not driven by obligation or duty to go back to church and start teaching Sunday school and get a men's group together, I just wanted to do it," he said. "I want other guys to feel that close to Christ like I do. It was such a great feeling."

Nancy Hermanson attended her walk in 1999 in Michigan after a move to Wisconsin to take a job with Kimberly-Clark. She said she went to the retreat because God told her to. "I had this urging I needed to do it," said Hermanson of Grand Chute.

Although she always has taken an active interest in her church, the retreat taught her that God should be in all aspects of life, "not just Sunday and not something you do with your Christian friends, It is how you live and how we are to recognize Jesus in everything we do."

The Rev. Tim Albrecht, pastor of Peace United Methodist Church in Kaukauna and a presenter at the men's Emmaus retreat, went on his walk in 1996 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he was attending the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

The church he also was serving at the time suggested he attend the walk.

"I learned a lot in school, but this was something felt in the heart," Albrecht said. "The part that was nice for me was I was just a pilgrim; I wasn't a pastor, just Tim. And I got to experience the grace of God."

### **Feeling the effects**

“I’ve heard people describe going on a Walk to Emmaus as getting the opportunity to be dipped in heaven for a weekend,” Jill Zimanek said. “The genuine love you experience in immersing yourself in Jesus Christ for those 72 hours is just amazing.”

“But one of the best parts is what happens after the weekend. When we lived in Georgia, we were gathering monthly with folks from every denomination to worship and fellowship together and weekly with our accountability group to both encourage each other in faith and also stay on track a Christian. I’ve commented to folks that in church and in Bible studies, I grow as a Christian in my accountability group, I’m reminded I am one.”

Every person who attends is required to have a sponsor who has attended a previous walk “to help you go through the emotional roller coaster as a person and as a couple”, Brad Zimanek said. “You try to do everything you can to not only help them go on the weekend and focus on there relationship with God. You want people to go in with an open heart and not worry about the outside world. If you go in with an open mind, God will fill it.”

You truly need to attend a walk with an open heart, praying God will meet you where you need him and fully listening to what he has to tell you”, Jill Zimanek said.

“He may speak to you through the 15 talks in some profound way. Or he may speak to you through prayer. Or he may speak to you through the love of others on the weekend. It could be a song. You just never know until you are there. I’ve not met two people yet who have had the same experience on a Walk to Emmaus, that’s how perfectly God meets their needs.”

## In the Beginning...

### **“Weekend away a transforming experience”**

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By Brad Zimanek

Post Crescent Sports Editor

Five years ago, attending a Walk to Emmaus weekend forever changed my life. I even categorize my life as Pre-Emmaus and Post-Emmaus.

The goal of the Walk to Emmaus is to develop Christian leaders, and it does that and so much more. I’ve seen it strengthen individuals, marriages, families, churches, and communities.

With the creation of the Fox Valley Walk to Emmaus, Christians here now have an opportunity to experience the same thing during two weekends in April.

The walks are open to singles and couples, but this column is directed to men.

There are no absolutes, but men are often selfish, goal oriented, and egotistical.

Throw in a little bit control freak, too.

Because of it, men often have trouble truly opening up as friends to other men.

Acquaintances? You bet. But men want to tell other men about the buck they bagged or the business deal they jumped through hoops to complete. They puff out their chests to say: "Look what I did."

After going on the Walk to Emmaus, I learned that men face similar daily struggles and through it were commanded to be more Christ-like in our journeys, And, better yet, we're not alone among our gender if we do.

But as you walk into a men's Emmaus 72-hour weekend, you would have a hard time convincing those who stepped out of their comfort zone that anything good might happen.

Many men are apprehensive and unsure of exactly what they are about to embark on. They are encouraged to put away watches and cell phones and struggle setting themselves free from constant motion of their lives.

When I attended, I wasn't overly enthused. Like most of my Christian life, I felt like a horse being pushed to the water trough, but that didn't mean I was going to drink.

Several amazing developments convinced me otherwise. When I, and others who were on the weekend with me, gave ourselves up, walls came crashing down through prayer, study, laughter, singing and praise.

My priorities were forever altered. God is now first. Followed by my family and church. My wife didn't recognize me when I returned home. Changes were dramatic enough that shortly after returning home, my daughter, Ayla, who was 11 at the time, said: "Where's my Daddy and what have you done with him?"

People often ask me to describe what happens and you really can't. It's different for every person.

God meets you where you need to be met on that week-end.

What meant something to me likely won't mean the same thing for someone else.

One example also shows where God has an incredible sense of humor.

Six months before attending the walk, I, as the sports editor in Athens, Ga., was attempting to get back to the newspaper downtown following a night football game between the University of Georgia and South Carolina.

As I was trying to sneak up the back way to the paper, I came to a barricade. An Athens-Clarke County police sergeant, Gary Epps, was not going to let me through even though I explained to him I needed to get back to work.

He finally let me go, but I was furious.

When I got to Emmaus, not only was Epps there, but he also was assigned to my small group.

By the time the weekend was over, we were best friends. It was as if we had known each other for years.

God gave me a Christian brother, one I can count on for anything, while meeting in the most unlikely of circumstances.

To put yourself in a situation where you are not in control takes courage. But attending an Emmaus weekend is an opportunity to grow in your Christian faith.

All 32 men I attended with gave testimony to the weekend being a life-transforming experience.

You don't have to be a sports editor to realize that you can't get a better batting average than that.

Jesus is the best clean-up hitter in bringing people home.

But, remember, you have to be willing to step up to the plate.