

A Covenant Community

The walk to Emmaus is a scripturally based experience in which God's Grace is re-experienced. The history of Emmaus is covered in the Nuts & Bolts section, but please be assured that it was born out of prayer, a Biblical framework, time and experience.

We get many questions like "Why do we do this?" or "Why is it done that way?" And many times, the answer is "Because that's how the Manual says to do it." The Manuals in question are the Upper Room Emmaus Team Manuals and The Upper Room Handbook on Emmaus, by Stephen Bryant, publications of the Upper Room International Emmaus Movement. The manuals try to provide the "why we do it the way we do it in Emmaus." We hope that this section will help you understand why community members often refer to the Manuals, because if you understand the reasons for certain things, it's a lot easier to follow the rules.

The following information is taken from The Upper Room Handbook on Emmaus, pages 2 – 5:

SOME THOUGHTS ON KEEPING FAITH WITH THE MANUALS

1. The manuals provide quality assurance that the Emmaus Weekend will be conducted with excellence, will present that which it is designed to present, and will represent the commonly held essentials of Christianity as set forth in the Emmaus Walk.
2. The manuals prevent Emmaus from being remade after the likeness of the various leaders. Emmaus is not leader-centered; it does not depend on charismatic personalities, especially gifted presenters, or experienced retreat master. Rather, Emmaus depends on a team of ordinary Christians working together in the Spirit of Christ according to the directions of an objective manual for a proven model. The Lay and Spiritual Directors for each walk are responsible to the local Emmaus Board of Directors, and the local Board is in covenant with The Upper Room to lead Emmaus according to the manual.
3. The manuals assure everyone that Emmaus, no matter where it is conducted, will be a common and trustworthy experience. We should be able to sponsor family and friends in other states and in other countries with confidence that Emmaus will be the same event for them as it was for us. If, on the other hand, communities take liberties with the weekend model, then the trustworthiness of the Walk is weakened and the quality depends increasingly on who the particular weekend leaders are.
4. The manuals set forth a model in which all of the parts are theologically congruent. The Emmaus Walk is a tightly woven event. Years of experience have gone into honing the model, which has proven its value and effectiveness as an instrument of the Holy Spirit for revitalizing
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- Christians as members of the body of Christ. Every part has a purpose. When we rework the model, adding this part and moving that part, we increasingly diminish its potential for working as a whole toward communicating the Christian message on many levels.
5. The manuals serve as a check on our human inclination to innovate. The fact is, most additions and changes in the model are for the team, not the Pilgrims. Team members may have experienced an especially meaningful worship service or ritual in another religious setting which they feel would add even more to the value of the Walk. The Walk to Emmaus, however, already includes more than anyone can absorb in three days and enough to chew on for a lifetime. We must remember that there are many other opportunities for Christian renewal; not everything that is meaningful has to happen during the three days of the Emmaus Walk.
 6. The manuals encourage creativity to be focused where it should be on given tasks within the Emmaus model. The place for creativity on the Walk is not in redesigning the architecture of the model, but in making the most of the given design to prepare the way of the Lord for the Pilgrims. Accepting the model and the manuals as a given, frees leaders to focus on the Pilgrims and to trust the Holy Spirit, not their own creativity for designing retreats. The manual is the plumb line centered on the prescribed program.
 7. The manuals free the Board and teams to focus their energies in the proper direction: on preparation for Walks and on Fourth Day Challenges, rather than on the design of the weekend.
 8. The manuals warrant adherence simply because a community is an Emmaus Community in covenant with The Upper Room. As a condition of that covenant, each community has agreed to follow the manuals. Each community will have its own local color, and minor differences will exist between some communities due to their background (location). The direction of change in a community's Emmaus Weekend should always be toward the standard model, not away from it.

We hope this helps you understand what being a "manual" community means and why the NRV Board considers adherence to the manuals so important. Please talk with any Board member if you have questions about this concept. The manuals are not "secret" and are available to anyone.