
EMMAUS SPONSORSHIP

Good sponsorship is vital to the integrity of Emmaus. Many communities take sponsorship for granted; they assume that everyone knows the how and why of sponsorship. Yet sponsorship is the most important job in Emmaus. It is more than just "signing up people". The quality of sponsorship influences the pilgrim, the health of the Emmaus Movement, and the church affected by the movement.

First, good sponsorship is your first act of agape before a Walk ever begins; the experience of the Walk for a pilgrim really starts with how we handle sponsorship.

Second, good sponsorship undergirds the whole weekend with sacrificial love on behalf of each pilgrim. Sponsors use discernment in recruiting pilgrims, embody the personal commitment of the community to each pilgrim, and provide personal acts of agape during the three days for the pilgrims. These acts of agape include prayer, agape letters, presence at Send off, Community Worship, and Closing, and follow-up.

Third, good sponsorship is the foundation for a healthy, effective Emmaus movement that is fulfilling its true purpose - the development of Christian leaders and the renewal of the church in ministry. The strength of any Emmaus community is a direct result of its recruiting practices. If the community is committed to recruiting strong church leaders for the purpose of strengthening the local church, then the community will be a strong, vital force in the renewal movement. If, on the other hand, the Walk to Emmaus is looked upon as a hospital where every human ill can be cured, it will have a weakening effect on the entire community.

WHY DO WE SPONSOR?

The aim of a sponsor should not be to "get all my friends to go", to fill up the weekend, to fix people's problems, or to reproduce one's own religious experience in others. Rather, the aim of the sponsor is to bring spiritual revitalization to Christians who, in turn, will bring new life and vision to the work of the church in the congregation, home, workplace, and community. The aim of sponsorship is to build up the Body of Christ.

WHOM DO WE SPONSOR?

One's awareness of and commitment to the purpose of Emmaus influences who is sponsored and how they are sponsored. Emmaus is for active Christians and members of churches whose own renewal will mean new energy, commitment, and vision in the church and everyday environments for Christ's sake. There are several qualities a prospective pilgrim should possess.

First, the person should already be on a pilgrimage, willing to grow and move forward in their journey of faith.

Second, the person should have a Christian passion. The pilgrim knows God can make and has made a difference in their life.

Third, the person isn't so consumed by life's circumstances that they are unable to give full attention to the message and experience of Emmaus.

Those sponsored could include the following:

- church leaders (pastors and laypersons) who will bring new vision, commitment, and understanding back to their congregations and who need the renewal and grace Emmaus channels;
- dependable church members who are the quiet backbone of the church;
- less active members who need their awareness of grace rekindled and their commitments renewed;
- christians who are hungry for “something more” and who want to grow spiritually;
- respected laypersons and clergypersons whose participation, support, and leadership will encourage others to attend the Walk and will build a sound, balanced leadership base for the movement in the community; and
- members of diverse congregations, denominations, and ethnic groups.

Emmaus is right for many people - but not for everyone. The religious background or emotional condition of some people may make Emmaus an improper discipleship tool for them. Others may be unsuitable for sponsorship because of the negative effect they might have on an Emmaus weekend or the divisive influence they might bring to the church. Sponsorship requires sensitivity to these factors. Some examples of questionable sponsorship are as follows:

- non-christians;
- christians whose theology and/or practice is notably different or incompatible with the traditional theology and practice represented by The Walk to Emmaus;
- persons undergoing an emotional crisis (for example, family breakup, job loss, severe grief) or who are psychologically unstable;
- “church-hoppers” – those who always have an axe to grind against the church; persons who will use Emmaus as a tool to divide the body, to further their own theological agendas, or who will create an “Emmaus church”;
- persons who are always looking for another spiritual high or another experience to help them “arrive”; and
- persons who decide not to attend a Walk after being presented the opportunity. A potential sponsor need not feel like a failure if a prospect says no. Perhaps the timing is not right. Perhaps God will renew the person in another way. Remember, The Walk to Emmaus is not the way to renewal for every Christian.

Wise sponsorship is purposeful and prayerful; unwise sponsorship is haphazard and undiscerning. Wise sponsorship eventually will produce a balanced, theologically centered movement of the Holy Spirit. Unwise sponsorship eventually will produce a harvest that becomes more of a burden than a blessing for the church.

HOW DO WE SPONSOR?

1. Pray for the person's openness to God's call to discipleship, not for how to get him or her to go on a Walk.
2. Extend an invitation. Invite the person to attend for the sake of a more vital relationship with Jesus Christ, not just an event to go to. Share your faith; explain the basic elements of the Walk, its purpose, and follow-up dimensions, which help us live in grace for the rest of our lives. Take the attitude that you are offering the person a wonderful gift rather than that they need to go.
3. Ask the person to make a commitment by filling out the application form. If the person is married, speak with both partners and encourage an equal commitment by both. ALL parts of the application must be completed and signed.
4. Continue to pray for your prospective pilgrim. Once the pilgrim has been assigned to a Walk, begin to prepare agape letters. Do not send personal agape for the pilgrim to be delivered during the weekend. Pilgrims are not allowed to receive individual agape during the weekend.
5. Support the Walk through your participation in the prayer vigil and your presence at Sendoff, Community Worship and Closing. Support the pilgrim's family by house-sitting, baby-sitting, feeding pets, watering plants, or just checking in with a spouse to see if any help is needed. For this reason it is best not to sponsor more than one pilgrim or couple at a time.
6. Encourage the pilgrim in his or her Fourth Day involvement. Talk to them about their weekend experience. Help the pilgrim find or start a reunion group. Take the pilgrim to the first Gathering after their Walk. You could even offer to baby-sit so your pilgrim can attend a Community Worship.
7. Help the pilgrim re-enter their church and consider ways to act out new commitment and enthusiasm.
8. Inform the pilgrim about ways to serve the Emmaus community on future Walks, creating agape and writing letters to other pilgrims.
9. Help the pilgrim understand how to sponsor others.

WHO CAN SPONSOR?

Any persons who have participated in Emmaus can sponsor another person to Emmaus so long as they understand the aim and responsibilities of sponsorship and can fulfill them for the person they would sponsor. Persons who have participated in Chrysalis can also sponsor adults to Emmaus under the same conditions.

THE EQUAL COMMITMENT RULE

The Letter of Agreement states that "husbands and wives are encouraged to make an equal commitment to participate." The rule does not mean that Emmaus primarily focuses on married persons. Single persons are as welcome to participate in Emmaus as married couples. However, the rule does reflect a concern and hope about the effect of Emmaus on marriages and families.

First, the equal commitment rule guards against the Emmaus experience becoming a divisive influence in a marriage. Emmaus can be the occasion for commitments to new life directions that one's spouse may not understand or appreciate at the time. The Emmaus Movement attempts to strengthen marriages and to avoid practices that may have the potential to affect a marriage adversely.

Second, when the rule is followed, Emmaus can indirectly strengthen the spiritual bond in a marriage and family. So sponsorship of married persons involves approaching both husband and wife together and encouraging them to make an equal commitment to participate.

Third, the equal commitment rule results in increased participation of many grateful husbands and wives who probably would not have attended a Walk otherwise but did so in order to make it possible for their spouse to participate. While their initial motivation for going on a Walk may not have been personal, they came to realize during the course of the weekend that the Walk was also meant for them.

The equal commitment rule does not mean a wife can never go to Emmaus unless her husband has gone first. It is always best to schedule spouses' participation in the same set of weekends so they can share their experience and support each other. However, circumstances may arise when husbands or wives must attend their Walks at different times. In these cases, the order of participation is secondary and becomes a practical matter.

Remember, however, that the equal commitment rule represents wisdom, not law. Exceptions may be granted when there is no possibility of participation by both spouses and reasonable assurance that the participation of only one spouse will not adversely affect the marriage.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY PILGRIM?

While a pilgrim may not know what questions to ask, you do not need to tell them everything that will occur during the three days. However, keep in mind there are no secrets! Saying to a pilgrim that you can't tell them anything about the Walk potentially creates unnecessary suspicion and anxiety. And for clergy and staff leadership, this posture often builds a wall of division that results in an "us vs. them" mentality against the Emmaus community. There is no reason to shroud the event in secrecy. This practice has probably done more harm to the movement than people realize. You can share many things about Emmaus without revealing some of the unique and meaningful experiences. Here are some suggested items to cover with a pilgrim.

- There are fifteen presentations (five each day) dealing with subjects like setting priorities, serving God in everyday situations, how to be a disciple, and how to persevere in faith. Encourage note taking.
- There is time spent in discussing these presentations.
- Time is spent in the chapel meditating and praying.
- Communion is emphasized.
- There is plenty of good food and fellowship.
- Discuss sleeping and showering arrangements with your pilgrim. A list of suggested items to bring is included with the pilgrim's assignment letter.
- No contact with family or business is expected except, of course, for emergencies.
- Tell how each weekend is unique, but each person seems to find exactly what God wants that person to experience. Don't try to prejudge what a person's needs are or what someone will get out of the Walk to Emmaus. Simply tell your own story. There are no expected results other than experiencing God's love.

THE APPLICATION

- ALL parts of the application must be completed and signed. Read the "Sponsor Information" section of the application carefully and prayerfully consider your responsibility as a sponsor before signing your name. Incomplete applications cannot be processed.
- Applications should be mailed or faxed to the Memphis Emmaus Community Registrar by the sponsor. The sponsor should do all communication with the Registrar regarding a pilgrim unless circumstances dictate otherwise.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Much of the material contained in this document is written and excerpted from the following two resources that are available through The Upper Room website at <http://www.upperroom.org/emmaus/>.

- DAY FOUR: The Pilgrim's Continued Journey by Robert Wood & Marie Livingston Roy
- THE UPPER ROOM HANDBOOK ON EMMAUS, 2nd Edition by Stephen Bryant & Richard Gilmore

Also consider these excellent resources (also available through The Upper Room website):

- SPONSORSHIP by Richard & Janine Gilmore – The Emmaus Library series
- WHAT IS EMMAUS? by Stephen Bryant – The Emmaus Library series