

HISTORY OF WALK TO EMMAUS



IN SOUTH GEORGIA

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In 1985 I had read about a new renewal movement called "Walk to Emmaus" for the development of church leaders. It was sponsored by The Upper Room located in Nashville, Tn. It was spreading across the States, and I wanted to have the program in the South Georgia United Methodist conference. My friend Danny Morris, working with the United Methodist Board of Discipleship in Nashville was active in the movement. He told me to go to Camp Sumatanga, the conference center of the North Alabama Conference to go on the walk, that "they do it right there!"

In early 1986 we called together some persons in Valdosta, where I was living as the District Superintendent. Some there had been on the Walk in North Georgia, because their children had told them about it, and we were joined, supported and encouraged by Episcopalians who had been on Cursillo and also Roman Catholics on their Cursillo, and by a Lutheran couple who had been on their (Tres Dias, (Cursillo - "a short course in Christianity") (Tres Dias - "three very special days")

Four of us in the Valdosta District applied at Sumatanga and were accepted for the February 1986 Walk for men, were Ron Creque, Jim Osborn, "Ned" Steele, and Lee Strother. We drove to the camp 45 miles north of Birmingham in the foot-hills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. We arrived on Thursday after a day's drive from Valdosta. We returned home on Monday after the Sunday night Closing. Ours was "AL#33." It was a joyful experience. We returned home excited! We wanted South Georgia to share in this experience! We've never forgotten it!

Our local planning committee continued to meet at Park Avenue Church in Valdosta. By April we were ready to host the first men's and women's Walks.

We couldn't have done it except with the total co-operation of our brothers and sisters from North Georgia and Alabama.

In April 1986, 16 men came in 3 vans from all over North Alabama to lead the conference room. An equal number came from North Georgia Emmaus to do the kitchen, agape, worship and angels. We had as many helpers come in as locals. But we had a great men's Walk at Camp J.D. Tygart 15 miles above Valdosta, a United Methodist Campground. Then two weeks later women from North Georgia ran the Conference Room, and women from North Alabama and Blue Lake (Alabama and West Florida) Communities came for the kitchen, agape, worship, etc. It was amazing to us that these good people brought all the worship materials, agape, table decorations, and LOVE! Both men's and women's Walks were great. As I recall, we had 30 men and 36 women Pilgrims from South Georgia on Walks #1 and #2!

The Steering Committee continued to meet and plan Fall walks for October 1986. Of these, half of the team in the Conference Room and Kitchen were visitors from the same places, and half were local people who had been on Walks #1 & #2. The visitors came in on Wednesday and coached locals Wednesday and Thursday before Walks #3 and #4 began on Thursday night.

Prior to October there had been a lot of long distant telephone calls and writing about preparing talks, kitchen, worship, agape, etc. before the actual teams came together on Wednesday before the Walks. Local Valdosta area people who had made their Walks gave half of the talks, and were working behind scenes in agape, kitchen, and worship along side the skilled visitors. They had told us in South Georgia "We're going to work with you on this second set of Walks and then it is "your baby to bounce"!! The Walks #3 and #4 went off beautifully and we'll be forever grateful in our hearts for those who came from long distances away to help us and teach us how to put on a Walk to Emmaus. They taught us WELL!

Ken Painter was the Lay Director for men's #5 and his wife Sandra L.D. for women's #6. Both went perfectly with SOUTH GEORGIA PEOPLE leading in every area of work. We were on our way! This was April 1987.

In that year we realized we were having so many Pilgrims and applicants from the Georgia Coastal area as far away as Savannah (150 miles) that we needed to start a Coastal Walk to Emmaus Community. Robert Marsh, retired Administrator of Candler Hospital in Savannah, had been on Walk #5. He and Raleigh Barres, an enthusiastic Episcopalian who had been through Cursillo, did all of the ground work basically. The Coastal Walk #1 was held in Fall 1987 at Ebenezer Camp near Rincon, Georgia. The teams and kitchen and other workers came from the Camp Tygart Walk named "South Georgia Walk to Emmaus Community." This was who put on Coastal Georgia Emmaus #1 and #2 for men and Then for women. In the Spring of 1988 the pattern which was set for us when we started the first walks was followed in Coastal Walks #3 and #4. Half of the teams were local, and half visitors from Valdosta (and other near-by areas.) Two Walk to Emmaus Communities had now started-up in South Georgia and with great numbers of eager applicants! Praise God - it was exciting!

In June of 1987 after six years on the Valdosta District, I was moved to Riverside Church in Macon. We found people in several Macon churches who wanted to go on a Walk. So we took Pilgrims from Macon to South Georgia Community at Camp Tygart and to Coastal Community, now meeting at St. John's Center, Savannah.

By 1989 we had about 50-60 men and women that had been on a Walk and wanted their own Community so in October 1989 the first men's and women's walks were held at a church camp near Lizella. The name "Heart of Georgia Emmaus" was thought-up by John Mitchell of Riverside United Methodist Church. It was thought then that the "Heart of Georgia" might include Dublin-Macon-Warner Robins-Byron-Ft. Valley and Perry. But God had bigger plans! The church camp near Lizella didn't work out well - Emmaus people wanted to re-arrange some furniture and the camp manager was upset. He couldn't take ANY CHANGE !! (Familiar?)

But later in 1989 Emmaus folk in Americus, many of whom had been through Camp Tygart offered Dooly Campground at Vienna in the Americus District. Shortly Albany Emmaus people joined in Heart of Georgia, for they, too, had gone on the Walk at Camp Tygart, and it was a long way there, and much closer for them to go to Dooly Camp Ground. So "Heart of Georgia" grew to include a wide swath through Central Georgia from Gray, Georgia to Albany and all in-between!

The Heart of Georgia Walks #3 and #4 were held at Dooly in the Spring of 1990.

Day Spring Community was begun in the Fall using Tatnall County Campground between Claxton and Reidsville. Many of the founders of Day Spring had made their walks at Coastal in Savannah.

Coastal helped them to get underway, as had been done with Coastal's start-up.

So now there are four (4) strong Walk to Emmaus Communities in the South Georgia Conference area, and a fifth starting-up in the Columbus, Georgia area, called "Valley" and a sixth "Golden Isles" on the South Georgia Coast including Darich, Brunswick, St. Simons, Kingsland and St. Marys..

In addition to Walks, the communities are engaged in KAIROS and TORCH ministries in correctional institutions and in CHRYSALIS for high school youth, and JOURNEY for college and young adult age persons.

Let us remember Walk to Emmaus is "to develop church leaders" is its stated purpose. Let us pray God uses it to renew His Church and to renew His people. For many of us, Walk to Emmaus at its best is a microcosm of what the Kingdom of heaven must be like! "Thank you, Jesus!"

Submitted by
Rev. Dr. C. E. "ned" Steele
Now of Macon
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