

My Walk to Emmaus Experience Christian Nelson, Reunion Group/POC Support

The uncertainty of how our lives will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic continues. How I interact with coworkers and friends is so radically different today than it was 6 months ago. How I interact with my church community has changed too. Today, I spend my Sunday mornings taking a walk with my sweet dog, then I settle into a comfortable chair to watch our church service on a live stream through Facebook. After the service, our Sunday school class meets over Zoom. Six months ago, I was able to see everyone in person, shake hands, share stories from the past week, and recharge my soul with song and fellowship in a space filled with people. Six months ago, I was also able to meet my Emmaus reunion group on Wednesday mornings for breakfast at Jim's on 183 and McNeil. Today, our group members are not comfortable meeting in a restaurant. I am proud to say that it finally dawned on me that I could have a reunion group meeting online using Zoom. We had our first meeting last week, and we agreed on a schedule for future meetings. This also gives us the ability to include group members that moved out of our area and that spend their summers up north in Michigan. How are you staying connected?

My name is Christian Nelson. I am new to the GAEC board, volunteering to fill the Reunion Group/POC Support position. My first task is to go through the Point of Contact list and update the primary contacts at the churches that participate in Emmaus. The list on the website will be updated over the next couple of months, so if you have updates that you would like to share please contact me at ReunionPOC@austinemmaus.org.

In 1996, my wife and I had two children and our third was due in March of the next year. We attended First United Methodist in Austin and we were part of an awesome Sunday school class that was busting at the seams. I hadn't heard about Emmaus, but one of our class members was the daughter of Tom Ausley, who was very active and who was the Board Representative on an upcoming walk. I think that we had 9 men from our class signed up for Walk 537 at Mount Wesley in November 1996. My walk was a life changing experience. I had no expectations of what the weekend would hold. It was the best walk ever and it was an important step in my faith journey. I found a picture of our table group (St Mark's – David Cansler, Mike McNeil, Spencer Swift, Steve Tackett, Hank Seyfarth, Christian Nelson, Dave McNeely, Bob Deming)



After my walk, I continued to grow. I remember bringing a bible to work so that I could have one at my desk. My faith wasn't something that I wanted to hide, I wanted to be asked about it. I participated in Disciple I and II, then I co-taught Disciple I with Rev. John McMullen the following year. The Disciple classes are a structured format to read and study the bible.

In 1999 we moved to Bethany United Methodist in North Austin. It wasn't long before we joined a Sunday school class and we started to make new friends. Finding a small group makes it easier for us to integrate into a church. We participated in church activities and events. Bethany has an annual church retreat at the HEB camp west of Kerrville in the spring that we attended. All these events provide opportunities to get to know others in the church. Also, along the way I was fortunate to have numerous male mentors from whom I could learn.

Our family has had a couple of crisis events in the past two decades. During these events, we were not able to manage on our own and our church family stepped in to help. For me, each of these events required me to reach out to God for strength because I wasn't able to stand on my own. I believe that we can grow in our faith during these trying events, because we are stretched to our limits. Just as our muscles are made stronger by lifting weights, our faith is made stronger by relying on God during difficult times.

The COVID-19 pandemic is just one source of unease in 2020. I pray that we will be able to pull strength from God. John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

