**ABQ Emmaus Fourth Day Group Together for 15 Years**

According to The Upper Room Emmaus website:

*The walk to Emmaus is an experience of Christian spiritual renewal and formation that begins with a three-day short course in Christianity. It is an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ in a new way as God’s grace and love is revealed to you through other believers.*

Following the Emmaus Walk, participants are encouraged to join Fourth Day groups.

Several Albuquerque women have been meeting as a Fourth Day Group since 2003 - 15 years of sharing their lives and bringing what Emmaus meant to them into the world.  Two of the founding members who still lead the group are Gretchen Crowe and Debbie Dixon.  I met with the group including Gretchen, Debbie, Andrea Jones and Barbara McRae.  There are 12 active women on their roster.  The usual meeting attendance is 5-8 women on Thursdays.  The age range is 40’s-70’s,except when college-aged daughters are in town over the summer.  Gretchen said that when the 20-somethings attend, the conversation definitely pivots to helping younger women figure out how to “do life”, but there is a lot of reciprocal learning too.

The premise of their time together is check-in and a book study.  This week, they were studying When Things Fall Apart by Pema Chodron (described as a female Richard Rohr) but they maintain that if while they are checking in, a topic arises that requires more of their attention, they will put the book aside.

Many small groups meet for a time and fizzle, so how have they managed to stay together and meaningful for 15 years?  The group began after several women from FUMC-ABQ did their Walk.  Deb said that they are always inviting new members and of course, some move or have other priorities. She, herself took a hiatus when she was working in Santa Fe but has returned.  Some are professional women who travel or who have other responsibilities, so they attend when they can.  If a member of the group knows of a woman who might be blessed and would be a blessing, they discuss it and then invite the person.  Theirs is a precious circle of trust and unconditional love, based in their experiences at Emmaus.

All agreed that in large part, the longevity of the group was due to the leadership of Gretchen - “The Anchor”.  She sends out a weekly encouraging email that tells the group what they are studying, updates, and asks whether they will attend or not.  If not, she makes sure all is well.  She provides a systematic organizational structure or in her words, she “nags”.  She keeps them accountable.  Andrea maintained that the meeting is not a chore, in fact it is a sustaining faith community that she relies upon.

They also have a breakfast once every month to discuss more personal things and every six months, they meet with their husbands too.  Debbie’s husband says at every meeting, “You all have changed ME.” because of who Debbie has become from meeting over the years with these strong women.

Sometimes group dynamics can be challenging.  They admit that they are diverse in age and how they view politics and religion.  The current political climate has not made things any easier.  They may disagree about what they are reading or the church or the country but when they meet it is “Sacred Ground”.  They said that as Jesus modeled, relationships are far more important than any issue at the table.  It is a place where they can be open and honest with each other despite their differences.  If Gretchen senses that someone’s feelings have been hurt, she will invite them for coffee and talk about it.

Asked how memories of their Walk impact their lives today or what they took away from their Walk, they talked about grace, experiencing God’s love, being affirmed by letters and unconditional love showered upon them, and a grounding.  Barbara said that Emmaus was a “Heart opener - a backbend” (a yoga reference).

Andrea said that in some ways the Fourth Day group has been even more impactful than her Walk.  They have walked through every sort of grief and joy together.  Their bookshelves are full of books they have studied together and they are different because of what they have read (even when they do not agree with the author).  They share the same insecurities and by sharing them, they can more easily put that aside.

These women are living into what Emmaus stirred in them.  They embody the spirit of Emmaus and have created a Fourth Day Group that will live on for many more days.  DE COLORES!!!!