On 24 and 25 May 1969, the first international meeting of the Emmaus movement was held at the Swiss Federal Parliament in Bern (Switzerland), at the request of Abbé Pierre, its founder, and the provisional committee that he had set up. Together with activists representing over 70 “communities, teams, volunteers and groups of friends of Emmaus” from 26 nations on 4 continents, they finalised and adopted the founding text called “Universal Manifesto of the Emmaus movement”.

According to the words of Abbé Pierre at the opening of the Assembly, this Manifesto should “express what we have in common through our differences” and serve as a basis “the body (which will be) mandated by the consent of everyone, to ensure the authenticity of the action of each group wishing to be a member of the Emmaus movement”.

In adopting the Universal Manifesto, the movement defined its identity and its vision of a fair and sustainable world where each person can live in dignity, freely and fulfil their destiny as an individual. It clearly forms part of the vision and ambition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 and to which Abbé Pierre contributed.

The reflection and editing work of the Universal Manifesto began in 1967, when Abbé Pierre entrusted Jean Hossenlopp - at the time his assistant in leading the Emmaus international secretariat - to carry out preparatory work drafting “Emmaus’ fundamental documents: Universal Manifesto, various customary documents, directory” Abbé Pierre, in his letters and accounts, insisted that this work “(should be) the result of joint collaboration by all”. In his letter dated 1 December 1968 “to organisers, group leaders, chairs of all the communities and all the groups of the Emmaus movement” throughout the world, he enclosed the brief first draft summary of a synthesis - inevitably imperfect - and encouraged its recipients to send their proposed amendments. The definitive draft was submitted to the world assembly for discussion and approval. After being debated at length, then amended slightly, the Universal Manifesto of the Emmaus movement was approved by “acclamation” on 24 May 1969.
50 years later, the Universal Manifesto is still our founding text and one of the indispensable references for all the organisations which form the Emmaus movement. Its content inspires and paves the way for the struggles the Emmaus movement still fights for today, with other social movements, for:

- Social and environment justice for a sustainable world;
- An ethical and solidarity economy to ensure access to fundamental rights;
- Peace, freedom of movement and residence for universal citizenship;

To develop and further specify the Universal Manifesto adopted in 1969, four other fundamental texts were adopted, with the latest being adopted by the General Assembly of Emmaus International in April 2016 in Jesolo (Italy). In their entirety, these five texts present the movement’s continuity of thought and its progressive development to respond as much as possible to the new challenges facing society and the environment for the decades to come.

THE FUNDAMENTAL TEXTS OF THE EMMAUSS MOVEMENT:

1. The "Manifesto Universal" (1969) which in 1969 represented "the lowest possible common denominator between the middle-class citizen of Switzerland and the Latin American revolutionary" confronted with the poverty of the slums.

2. "Scope and limits of Emmaus's social commitment" (1979) which addresses the social engagement of Emmaus, defining and reaffirming the political dimension of the movement.

3. "Emmaus principles and membership charter" (1996) which specifies the groups’ responsibility regarding transparency and participation in the life of the movement and the right of companions to be involved.

4. "Solidarity commitments" (1999) which constitutes the second update to the Universal Manifesto, made almost 30 years after its adoption. Its sub-heading summarising the ambition: "A statement of our values, our responses to the challenges of modern society and how we can work for change".

5. "Our values and guiding principles" (2016) which, 10 years after Abbé Pierre’s death, reinjects the founder’s energy and presents a renewed basis of the Emmaus membership values.