
 Emmaus House

A French priest who started an international movement for the homeless that emphasizes the poor helping their fellow poor saw the results of his efforts during a visit to New York this past fall.

Father Henri Antoine Grouse, founder of the international Emmaus movement, began his movement in 1949 when a homeless man asked for help, and the priest turned the tables by asking the man to help build a community where people would support themselves by their own work and also help others more needy than themselves.

He set the poor to work as ragpickers and house-builders. The ragpickers would find reusable items in the trash and earn money to buy materials for the men constructing homes for the homeless.

He last visited New York when Father David Kirk of East Harlem was trying to buy a small hotel, then a house of prostitution, for an Emmaus House. After the French priest went back home, Father Kirk said, money started arriving from European groups which give \$2,000.00 each from money they had earned.

The movement, taking its name from the Gospel account of disciples finding their despair turned into renewed hope through an encounter with the risen Christ, now has about 250 groups in 30 countries.

The French priest, known to everyone by the name of Abb Pierre he got as a member of the Resistance in World War II, said in an interview at Emmaus House in New York, one of six North American members of the Emmaus movement, that although the suffering of Harlem was doubtless less than that of a city such as Calcutta, India, where Mother Teresa works, it was also less excusable in the United States because of this country's resources.

He did not advocate more welfare assistance, however, "You should provide people with jobs," he said. Father Kirk said he joined the Emmaus movement in 1969 but did not really begin to operate ac-



ording to its philosophy until Abb Pierre sent him a ticket to come for a visit in 1978.

"Being with Abb Pierre changed my direction," he said. "I come out of the Catholic Worker movement, and have done hospitality work since my 20's... The Catholic Worker movement would not say everyone has to work, but we say everyone has to work," Father Kirk explained.

"This is a reversal of the idea of church people serving the poor. We let the poor make new lives for themselves and for their poor brothers and sisters."

Anne Troy, who directs the Emmaus House program, said when the homeless show up at Emmaus House, they get shelter. But in a couple of days they find they are not guests but workers, putting in 35 hours for room, board and a modest stipend. They may be passing out food and clothing to the homeless still on the streets or doing carpentry to help the house support itself.

Emmaus House also cares for a few people with AIDS, and is trying to get another building where it can expand this ministry.