

CHURCHES

Emmaus House warms the neglected for 33 years

Emmaus House on 124th Street in Harlem celebrated 33 years of service to and solidarity with the poor on April 14.

Emmaus has been known for its work for change in both society and church. In the 1960s, Newsweek referred to Emmaus as the "Mecca of the New Left," headquarters for opposition to the war in Vietnam and for a more just society. Emmaus became a center for the Black Panthers and a budding Young Lords. Emmaus emphasized church as community and as "a hospital for wounded humanity," as St. John Chrysostom said.

Emmaus was founded by the Rev. David Kirk, a Melkite Catholic priest of the tradition rooted in Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, but united with the Church of Rome. Melkite Catholics have been prophetic witnesses within the universal church that one does not need to be Roman in order to be Catholic. Kirk worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Dorothy Day before being ordained as a priest for the poor in Jerusalem in 1963.

Emmaus, little by little, has become a community of the

homeless and poor who build their own housing, create their own income and serve others still on the street. Their approach to homelessness is holistic and integral, contrary to city shelters that give meals, a bed and social services. Every Emmaus community member must work six hours daily, work on education at night (literacy, GED, college, vocational), have therapy, supportive community, reorientation in values and action for so-

cial change and personal change. The community is different because its structure is a circle rather than a pyramid. Social workers support rather than dominate; the homeless are involved in all decision making, including hiring and firing. The work - including three houses: Emmaus House, Jerusalem House and Emmaus Inn - is run essentially by the homeless themselves. The community thus becomes a healing,

empowering community. Emmaus tried a government grant once, but in the words of its community coordinator, Tyrone Baker, "The city's policy concerning the homeless was essentially anti-human and created new dependency in new disguises." Thus, Emmaus prefers to live simply, with each member, including Kirk, taking a \$25 weekly stipend only. Emmaus seeks to make its own income through "Emmaus Works," do-

ing housing renovation work. Later in the year, the Emmaus Store will open, selling quality used goods at low prices, located next door to the future largest supermarket in Manhattan (Pathmark).

"We live on the edge where we belong, where most of the people of the world live; we live totally in dependence on God," Kirk said. "The church should be in solidarity with the poor, and it should look like it."

