

Emmaus House warms the neglected for 42 years

UPDATE
 1998 Amsterdam News
 Article updated 2006

Emmaus House, on 124th Street now 120th Street, celebrating 42 years of service, witness and solidarity with the poor, in 2007.

Emmaus has been known for its work for change in both church and society. In the 1960's Newsweek referred to Emmaus as the "Mecca" for those seeking justice and peace. It was the headquarters for opposing all war -- from Vietnam to Iraq. Emmaus became a center for Black Panthers, and many local and global issues. In the Church they challenge others to return to Orthodox Christian tradition of the undivided Church of early centuries, opposed to papal absolutism and wild individualism.

In 1965, Emmaus House was founded by Fr. David Kirk, an Eastern Melkite Catholic priest, of a small Eastern church united with Rome; in recent years the contradictions became too severe and are returned to the larger Orthodox Christian churches, which are primarily routed in Asia and Africa, a whole different understanding of God and world. Emmaus continues, awake and aware, its commitment to the poor and to Christian unity through common work of justice and compassion. Kirk, at 18, led actions protecting the first black

person admitted to a desegregated college (Autherine Lucy/Alabama) later he worked with Dorothy Day with the homeless on the Bowery.

Emmaus, little by little, has become a community of the homeless and the 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 social change and personal change.

The community is different because its structure is a circle rather than pyramid. Social workers support rather than dominate; the homeless are involved in all decisions making, including hiring and firing. The community thus become 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-\$50 weekly stipend only.

Emmaus has tried to bring in some income through the work of their hands among several community projects creating income has been:

- **Emmaus Works:** woodwork shop building portable closets for NYC hospitals and nursing homes; contracting housing renovation work.
- **Emmaus Store:** selling quality used goods.
- **Emmaus Road Runner:** moving company.

Many Emmaus service projects have developed from the human needs of the homeless, most of whom are today independent.

- **Emmaus Inns** a community of homeless people living with AIDS, sum 60 apartments and about 90 people.
- A legal service for the homeless now called **Urban Justice Center** with sum 19 lawyers.
- **Upper Room Ministry,** advocacy and education program about AIDS,

now the independent Harlem United the largest AIDS program in Harlem.

- **Women's Project:** taking women out of crack houses into new life.

Presently Emmaus itself continues its basic work in a smaller building, waiting for the finding of larger buildings:

- **New life program** for the homeless living, serving, growing together.
- **Traveling Kitchen:** feeding meals from their van over the city.
- **Bread and Pantry:** sharing basic groceries, breads and vegetables with poor families.
- **Hospitality:** for a few days.
- **Outreach:** responding to every human need they can.

Their Chapel of Christ, the Homeless One in the ancient shape with icons and color through out, a sacred for prayer and meditation.

"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."

