



The road to Eumaus or Self-help for homeless people

Possibly you do not yet know about "Emmaus"; we think it is an exciting and promising approach to the problems of homelessness. Homelessness means so much waste because it is so often part of the circle : "no home"; "no job"; "no hope", and Emmaus offers a home, a job, and some meaning to life. It does NOT offer a "hand-out", but it does offer a hand up out of the frustrating cycle of poverty and homelessness.

Those homeless folk who come to Emmaus become "companions" within the community. It is not a religious organisation and there are few rules - they are required to sign off the dole; they promise not to bring drink or drugs into the group; and they are required to work a 40 hour week within the community. In return, they have a roof over their heads, clothing, food, heating, £28 per week of spending money, and £5 per week credit to a savings account. If they break the rules they may be suspended for a time BUT they will always be allowed back to rejoin their companions.

Emmaus communities are self-supporting once they have been started. They survive by collecting all sorts of donated goods, including furniture and bicycles, refurbishing them and then selling them through the community shop. There are already flourishing Emmaus communities in Cambridge, Coventry and Greenwich with another newly formed in an old fort at Dover, but plans are already forward for several more and one of these is for Oxfordshire and it will be sited in the vicinity of Oxford.

This article is, therefore, first of all a piece of information - we hope soon to have our own County's Emmaus community. BUT it is also an invitation to help if you can. We described earlier how the Emmaus communities are self-supporting - once they have been started - but, before it can work, the pump needs priming and the Oxfordshire Emmaus community will need a lot of help - including financial help - to get it started. Remember, these communities are not there to give hand-outs - they aim to solve the problem by lifting the destitute from the hopelessness - the very name "EMMAUS" is used because it is a symbol of hope...

The first Emmaus community was created by Abbé Pierre, a priest, politician and resistance worker in post-war Paris where he took desperate homeless people into his own home. Paradoxically, instead of asking how he could help them, he asked these "companions" how they could help him to ease the plight of the huge numbers of destitute people in war-torn Paris. From them he learned about rag-picking and so the first companions were known as "chiffonniers" - and they were able to provide for themselves and help others in need.

The basic theme is of sharing and helping homeless people to help themselves. The Logo at the top of this article shows the Hand of Work, the Dove of Peace, and the Flower of Hope.

Emmaus is a registered charity, (No. 1002787). If you feel you can help in any way please will you let us know or contact Jean Williams, the secretary of Emmaus Oxfordshire U.K. on 01865-511678.