



The History and Ethos of Emmaus

The Emmaus movement was founded by a French cleric and MP, Abbé Pierre (Father Henri-Antoine Groués), in 1949. A former Capuchin monk, he trained for the priesthood and was ordained in 1938.

During the Second World War he worked for the French Resistance. He took many Jewish families and others under threat, over the mountains into Switzerland and was later denounced to the Gestapo, but managed to escape and join the Free French forces in North Africa. His war ended as a senior naval chaplain, and despite his opposition to the Gaullists, he was persuaded by General De Gaulle to stand for parliament.

It was with another former resistance worker, Lucie Coutaz, that he established the first Community. To begin with, he simply opened his own presbytery to homeless people who he found on the streets of Paris. He had planned his large, dilapidated house in Paris suburb of Neuilly Plaisance, to be a student hostel fostering reconciliation among Europe's post-war generation. But already it was pointing in the direction he was to go; it was being shared with 18 homeless men on whom went his whole salary, buying war-surplus materials for them to put up temporary homes, first in his own large garden.

Gradually these Communities, whose members became known as Les Chiffoniers d' Emmaus (the rag pickers of Emmaus), took on a dynamic of their own as the 'Compagnons' and showed they could support themselves by using skills learned whilst they had been living on the streets.

By recycling, refurbishing and re-circulating other people's rubbish, the Communities were eventually able to make enough income to support themselves.

In Parliament, as an independent allied to the socialists, he found himself battling, not just with the social problems of his poor constituency in the mining towns of Meurthe-et-Moselle, but with those of the unemployed and roofless refugees crowding Paris in 1949. Abbé Pierre has consistently sought to champion the cause of the underprivileged and to fight against the poverty, unemployment and homelessness which scar modern society. Emmaus is just one of the fruits to have grown from the seeds of hope he has planted in people's minds.

The Emmaus Movement in the UK

Emmaus Cambridge was the first Community to open in the UK in 1991. Since that time a further 26 Communities have opened, providing a home, meaningful voluntary work and support for formerly homeless people. There are many other Emmaus groups throughout the UK, all at different stages of development and all with the aim of creating new Communities. The Emmaus movement in the UK is a federated structure of which Emmaus Cambridge is a member.

Emmaus UK is the umbrella organisation for, and is accountable to, the Federation members, offering advice and support to all Emmaus projects across the UK. It performs many functions such as raising national and local awareness, assisting new Community formation and initial group formation.

Emmaus UK raises funds nationally to support the growth of the Emmaus Movement in the UK. The funds are raised to support new Communities through the Development Fund as well as funding the work of Emmaus UK. Every Emmaus Community in the UK, including Emmaus UK, is a separate registered charity.

Emmaus UK is affiliated to Emmaus International. Communities are also members of Emmaus International on an individual basis and have voting rights and representation at Emmaus International, which exists to promote the ideals of Emmaus throughout the world, forging links with other groups working to alleviate poverty and homelessness as well as sponsoring projects in areas of greatest need.

Terminology

Emmaus

Emmaus is a secular organisation. However, the name does come from a story in the New Testament of the Bible. It is the name of the village towards which two disciples were walking when they met the resurrected Christ and received new hope and purpose. Whether myth or not, the story is a message of new hope and vision, where before there seemed nothing but despair. When Abbé Pierre first opened his house to homeless people he had named it Emmaus house and so, because that was where the Movement started, the name was adopted. The Emmaus logo was designed by a Chilean Companion. It depicts a dove with its wings as the hand of work. The flower represents renewal through recycling.

Companions

Companion is the term used to describe those who come to live in the Communities. The early residents called themselves the Companions of Abbé Pierre. Throughout the Emmaus movement the term Companion has been adopted to describe the members of Communities.

When Emmaus came to Britain we faced the choice of adopting the same usage or choosing between other possibilities, such as 'user', 'customer' or 'client'. No other word in English seemed adequately to encompass the full sense of sharing and working alongside each other in fellowship and solidarity, which is the essence of Emmaus. Everyone involved in Emmaus should consider themselves a Companion.

Trustees

Charity Trustees are the people responsible under charity law for controlling the management and administration of the charity.

All Emmaus Communities are companies limited by guarantee as well as being a registered charity. The members of the Board are usually, although not always, the Trustees of the charity and, therefore, also the Directors of the Company.

The Board, as the Trustees of the charity, is responsible for the governance of the charity and the development of its strategic policies as well as the fulfilment of its aims and objectives. The Board is also responsible for compliance with Charity and Company Law and other statutory requirements.

The role of the Board is to be responsible for overseeing the effective running of the Community, ensuring that it lives up to the ideals of the Emmaus movement, as well as supporting the staff and Companions in the community. It also has a responsibility to ensure that the Community is run in a safe and caring way with high standards maintained in all areas of operation.

Volunteers

The Community occasionally makes use of Volunteers in supporting a tasks that the Community is unable to do itself. Volunteers give their time freely to assist the movement in its aims. They receive no remuneration for their work.

Solidarity

As an international movement, Emmaus encompasses a whole variety of different expressions of commitment to the Emmaus ideals. The common feature that binds them all is a belief in social justice for all through solidarity in action. The ideals of Emmaus worldwide are contained in a document known as the Solidarity Commitments.

Universal Manifesto

Any group or Community that aspires to be a part of the Emmaus International Movement must accept and adhere to the Universal Manifesto of the Emmaus Movement.

Our guiding principle is one which is essential to the whole human race if there is to be any life worth living, and any true peace and happiness, either for the individual or society: Serve those worse off than yourself before yourself. Serve the most needy first.

Our conviction is that respect for this principle must be the driving force behind any search for justice, and therefore peace, in the world.

Our aim is to act so that each individual, every society, every nation may live, flourish and achieve fulfilment in a spirit of giving, sharing and mutual respect.

Our method is to create, support and promote Communities in which all feel free and respected, and where they can meet their own needs and help each other.

Our primary means wherever possible is through recycling and re-circulating. This form of work prevents waste as well as increasing the possibilities for providing emergency relief to those most in need.

Every other means of arousing consciences and of presenting the challenge of Emmaus must be used to help and persuade others to help those who are most in need, by sharing their hardship and their struggles, both public and private, until the causes of all their ills are removed.

Our freedom. In carrying out this task Emmaus recognises no ideal other than that expressed in this Manifesto and no other authority other than its own constitution. It acts in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations and with the just laws of every society and every nation. It makes no distinction on political, racial, linguistic, religious or any other grounds. Acceptance of this Manifesto is the only requirement of anyone wishing to share in our work.

Principles of Emmaus in the UK

The following which are called the Principles of Emmaus in the UK, express the first guiding principle of the Universal Manifesto of Emmaus, in practical terms.

The Emmaus movement in the UK accepts and abides by the Universal Manifesto. In addition to abiding by the Universal Manifesto, all Communities in the UK are expected to live by the following principles:

- To accept into Emmaus Communities anyone who seeks to join, regardless of their past, constrained only by availability of space

- To accept everyone as they are and to extend the hand of friendship and trust to all
- To share with and to work alongside others, accepting everyone as being of equal value
- To ask of others only that they work to the best of their ability, accepting their limitations, but sharing the gifts and skills they bring. Not to impose expectations on others
- To exclude no-one permanently from an Emmaus Community, always allowing each person as many opportunities to return to the Community as they wish, to foster within Emmaus Communities a spirit of sharing in a common endeavour in an atmosphere of mutual support, friendship and solidarity
- To be willing to listen to others and to learn, sharing your own skills and knowledge freely
- To provide, within all Communities, personal privacy and space to each Companion and to nurture self-development and growth in all
- To work to achieve a self-supporting Community, where any surplus generated is devoted to the needs of others
- To ensure that all funds surplus to the immediate needs of a Community, or its requirements for foreseeable growth and development, are devoted to the needs of others and not to accumulate cash surpluses unnecessarily
- To be willing always to support the growth of new Communities, or to come to the help of Communities in financial difficulty, whether in the UK or elsewhere in the world