



(quarterly paper of Genvej til Udvikling)

- obituary of Abbé Pierre written by Jørgen Olsen, coordinator of Genvej til Udvikling, Denmark, member of Emmaus
- translated into English by member af Genvej til Udvikling, Kristian Katholm Olsen
- unknown photographer at front page
- drawing by Plantu.

Goodbye to an Adventurer

Already from when I was a child, have I had a longing for death. When we had kissed my dead grandfather goodbye on his forehead before the coffin was closed, I said to my mother that I did not understand anything of it all. All of the time they talked about him being in Heaven, but I could see him lying in there, couldn't I? – Then my mother explained me about Heaven and from that time I have carried a longing in me and prayed to get there. An impatience to see what is on the other side. But no matter how much I pray about it, good God have not yet heard me. – On the contrary: It is more like he is laughing at me up there and let me live... But think about going to a place where there is no poor people! A place where there is no war.

In this way Abbé Pierre (AP) expressed himself in 2003 and we had to wait until the 22nd of January 2007 before he succeeded in getting his curiosity satisfied as regards the hereafter.

The laid-back attitude towards death was perhaps a reason why AP did not run away from taking a risk when it was necessary, especially during World War II when he was a priest in Grenoble in the Alps and helped Jews and resistance people over the border to the neutral Switzerland.

Material comforts as a purpose itself did not interest AP. His life and work was decisively marked by his insist on the active humanity. But his ravenous appetite for experiences also played a part for the small and great choices he made: As long as life was, it had to be lived.

It is not many years ago, AP drove by bus in the Andes on his way from a meeting in Argentina to a meeting in Chile, and on the way he asked to be set down to walk 4-5 kilometres in the very thin air, supported by his stick – then he had also tried that.

To the last AP sat in his apartment at the secretariat of Emmaus International in Alfortville by Paris and surfed on the internet to keep up to date of what happened in the world, and he continued to be present at the meetings in various Emmaus organs, though his participation often was limited to welcome people and sit by the table an hour to an hour and a half.

AP's thirst for knowledge was among other things reflected in the fact that he had a swarm of very different friends including quite a few who did not share the wish for diversity. A question which is discussed in many circles is how tolerant you should be to the intolerant and how democratic you should be to the undemocratic. AP believed in openness, broadness and the living democracy.

Emmaus has had space for people of all cultures and convictions ever since the movement was founded in November 1949. The foundation was the meeting between AP and the just released murder-convicted and lonely Georges, who missed something to live for and found it by – together with AP and a fast growing number of working mates – building houses to the homeless people in Paris and collecting, sorting and selling used things, whether the scrap or the flea market sale goods should be picked up at the waste disposal sites or in private homes.

Emmaus spread out over the world, but you had to wait until 1969 before an organization was established with a secretariat and international general assemblies. When the seventh of its kind was kept in Cologne in 1992, AP said in his speech among other things: “A lot of my friends are communists and they feel that their lives have failed because the revolution did not take place. I experience that every day love actions take place which make life worth living.”

And Emmaus lives and grows.

