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Emmaus COMPANIONS

tam-tam: the Emmaus news wall

“The basic definition of Emmaus is: to shelter and live together, set free by the bread earned through work (...) to have the right and be able to become activists within society.”

Abbé Pierre



EMMAUS INTERNATIONAL

Editorial

“I need you!” by Jean Rousseau, President of Emmaus International

Throughout his life, Abbe Pierre would often allude to how Emmaus was brought into being: in his eyes, the unexpected meeting between the priest/member of parliament and Georges, who had previously attempted suicide and was to become the first companion, symbolized the cornerstone of Emmaus, and was to inspire all initiatives carried out

in the name of the Movement. Just like on that first day, the original meeting is relived again and again, demonstrating the unbroken strength of the appeal for another kind of world where everyone, whoever he or she is, counts. “I have nothing to offer you, but you, who have nothing more to live for, come and help me help.” Living in communities,

the companions rise to this challenge every day and are often personally affected by the example of Abbe Pierre. They are acutely aware of their role in building a welcoming world and in fighting poverty. It is up to all of us, in the communities and throughout the whole organisation, to bring alive the original meaning of Emmaus: “I need you!”



All aboard

- Make Emmaus International known, through talking about activities at local events, public meetings or in schools for example.
- Meet companions from around the world - you can do it by taking part in work camps that are organised in various countries: Indonesia in 2007, Benin in 2010 - great opportunities for sharing - not to be missed!
- Companions play a crucial role in international solidarity: get involved in shipping containers to the other side of the world; organise a sale at your community for Emmaus International - the profits will fund solidarity activities etc.
- Meeting in Anglet (France) in March 2012 for the Emmaus World Assembly: companions from all over the world, sent by their groups, will meet and decide on the future of the whole Movement.

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contact@emmaus-international.org
47 av. de la résistance - 93104 Montreuil Cedex, France
Publication director: Jean Rousseau and the Publications Group
Designed and drafted by Mélanie Veillaux
Translated by Laura Sharpe
Graphic design: Nicolas Pruvost (www.nicolaspruvost.fr)
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Emmaus on the move

Some 7000 companions, in four continents make up the Emmaus Movement. Together they are a collective force, assisting those who are more in need than themselves. This chain of solidarity, unlike any other embodies real human wealth, bringing together people who are all very different, but who share the same values. Who are these companions “without borders” and what does the Emmaus Movement mean to them?

For Alphonse, a companion at Emmaus Pahou (Benin), being an Emmaus companion is about “living and working with others to overcome problems”. Having left his village and family to survive, he was welcomed unconditionally at Pahou in 2003. Since then, he has regained his confidence through getting involved in the community’s activities: he now assists the community leader and is in charge of coordinating and following up micro-credit projects.

He found stability through helping others: “help me help others” said Abbe Pierre to Georges, the first companion. Alphonse also found fraternity at the community. Thousands of kilometres from Africa, Robeiro from the community in Pereira (Colombia) shares Alphonse’s feelings. “A companion is someone who welcomes and supports a new companion when he arrives”, he explains. This shared value is enshrined in the Universal Manifesto: “Serve first those who suffer most”.



Different types of communities

Emmaus communities are living spaces and work places, and represent what the Movement is based on: shelter / work / service. These principles go hand in hand with communal living,



which is based on solidarity and helping others. Companions come to communities for many different reasons. Sometimes community life offers a final chance, enabling people to regain

dignity and confidence. Living together means benefiting from the safety of being in a group and from opportunities on offer, like integration through work. Living together may also be a lifestyle choice, enabling people to live alternatively in a community. However in some countries in Asia, life in a community doesn’t really exist so other types of activities are carried out to “serve first those who suffer most”.

An essential commitment

Companions here and there have different statuses, but the aim is always the same: get involved in solidarity activities that are useful. And that’s what’s great about being part of an international Movement: you can help others, even on the other side of the world. This is the essence of the Movement, and nothing would be possible without the companions. That’s what Martin, from the community in Coventry (United Kingdom) feels: “I am contributing to a body of like-minded people worldwide whose shared motivation and ethos represent all that is worthwhile in our continually troubled world.”

Many people pass on these values, like Robeiro who hopes to “contribute to Emmaus’s development in Colombia, by setting up new groups that can make Abbe Pierre’s message known.”

Since it was first set up, Emmaus has enabled the voices of the unheard to be heard. In 1988, Abbe Pierre replied to someone who asked him what Emmaus was: “Ordinary people who say essential things”. These essential things have since then enabled social and economic alternatives to be created, offering a society that produces values and gives life meaning. This is what Emmaus companions are working for in 36 countries around the world.



Next port of call... Cologne (Germany)

The second European meeting of Emmaus companions was held in Cologne (Germany) in March 2011. Jocelyne Hotte, a companion since 2005 at the Emmaus community in Saintes (France) was there. She told us what the meeting was about.

What is a companions’ meeting? In France, companions have always got together, at regional companions’ meetings and national companion days. These meetings gradually developed internationally as well. For three days, companions meet up to get to know each other better and to share their points of view.

How was the meeting in Cologne? This year, about twenty companions from six countries were there. It was really well organised - there were workshops on the theme of “Emmaus on the move”. We tried, for example to define what solidarity is, with pictures from magazines. It’s great to meet each other, even if there is a language barrier. I learned that communities in Germany are not based on the same system as the ones in France - companions choose to live there because they are committed to the values of Emmaus. Unconditional shelter as it exists in France is not the same in all countries. But there is still a community spirit - everyone looks after each other. We also helped load a lorry for Poland. A friend from the community there came to watch, it was very moving. We discussed good working methods, to see how we all work. There is a fantastic



atmosphere at the meetings, allowing companions to open up to others and to the Movement.

What role do you think companions will play in Emmaus in the future? Whether you’re a companion from Europe or elsewhere, Emmaus is the only place you can come empty-handed and leave with a full heart. If you want to leave, that is. In future, if we want to live in a society where there’s more solidarity and conviviality, we need to pass on the values of Emmaus to young people, and make them aware of this solidarity.