

Emmaus House Day Centre in Acton

We have Emmaus House here which is one of the centres belonging to Acton Homeless Concern and I will take you around shortly to our second centre, the Damien Centre. In between there is the Catholic Church and that is the link if you like because eighteen years ago two priests in the parish responded to a need, with the help of many volunteers, and they set up Emmaus House.

We are here today to deliver perishable food to the Emmaus single homeless project. We are working with donors such as Marks and Spencers and Sainsburys to save it from going into landfill.

This is David Oliver from Scotland. I have always called him Mr. Oliver and he just calls me Oliver. His surname is Oliver and my Christian name is Oliver.

Ollie was a client here when it opened first and he is a recovering alcoholic. They have to be off the drink for a few days before they can help here.

This is Rose our project worker.

This became the centre for him, the place where he found stability and friends, whether he was drinking or not drinking.

I remember the first time I came in, I fell in the door. I had had a few drinks and I was hungry as well. About the second or third time I came here one of the ladies asked if I would be able to do a bit of washing up so I have been here ever since. This is Tom, he is off the drink at the moment and I wish him all the best. This is my good friend from Poland, one of very good manners.

We have many volunteers now from local churches: from Chiswick to Northolt to East Acton. They don't only come through the church, we have some volunteers who have been recommended to come here to do some volunteering in order to help them.

I look upon the people here as my family: the people who use the centre and the people who run it; the sisters, especially Sister Aileen. I have met some lovely people and volunteers over the years from all walks of life and different cultures and it has been a pleasure. Look at me for the food, no wonder I am looking so well! Wonderful chef.

If our volunteers don't do it, if anybody doesn't do it, who is going to, who is going to show the face of Christ – there is no other face but ours. Before we refurbished here [Damien Centre] we had square tables, then we got these round tables. We just thought they looked good. When the clients came in and saw the round tables they told us they really liked the tables. We asked why and they said, well, they are round and not square. We asked what difference does that make and they said the other square tables reminded them of prison and prison visits. Psychologically it had a big impact on them. We have an open door policy and we don't ask any questions. Anybody that comes in through that door is welcome and it does not matter about age, gender, religion or ethnicity; they are welcome.

Before I moved to Acton I was three days on the street. When I landed here I had no luggage – just me and God came here – and we arrived here as a package.

I have known Ben a long time, I can't put years on it, but it has been a long long time and he has always been very nice. He does give us a bar of a song and he does some poetry as well.

Pointless War

The soldiers that march on to war, not knowing what they are fighting for
For them it may be the end of a pointless war that will end

And when time stood still, the bugle sound is calling, while babies cry and mothers die
and the homeless walk around wondering why

Men like me who found no place for war are buried way down below.

I have seen the last of the rising sun because my death is soon to come.

I will no longer walk the sandy shores with my eyes tight spores

I have lived in spite of this and I struggle to exist.

So now I end my suffering heart, my love, my life, I now depart

In peace be found without blood shed, many tried but now they're dead.

By Ben.