

December 25, 2007

## **Long Island Parish Joins Social Services Work In Harlem**

*Orthodox Christians contribute time, food, and singing to the homeless*

**Harlem, NY** –Two priests from Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, East Meadow, NY celebrated pre-Nativity Vespers for the staff and residents of Emmaus House here on Sunday, December 23, 2007. Members of the parish choir joined the clergy to sing the responses and saw firsthand, the ongoing work and needs of this Orthodox outreach to residents of Harlem.

“While the festal texts and music made an impact on those in attendance, we were touched by the stories shared by residents to overcome difficult personal situations with assistance from Emmaus House,” said the Rev. Martin Kraus, rector of Holy Trinity.

Located in the heart of Harlem, at 160 West 120th Street, Emmaus House was founded in the 1960s by the Rev. David Kirk as a mission to meet the needs of local residents. Providing food, temporary shelter, and social services, Emmaus House affected the lives of many in the community. After Father David fell asleep in the Lord in May 2007, board members began crafting plans to insure the continued assistance for former drug and alcohol addicts to find their way back into society through Emmaus House. Board members include Dr. Albert and Julia Raboteau, and ‘graduates’ of Emmaus House, Darryl Wood and Luis Centeno.

“Father David spent a lifetime working with people,” said board member, Rev. John Garvey. “Recognizing the importance of his work in these neighborhoods, I wanted to insure his legacy continues.”

Working with other Emmaus House board members, a 501c3 non-profit organization, Father Garvey began spreading the word about the institution, and what it will take to sustain its mission. When he spoke with local Orthodox Christian clergy, Father Kraus of East Meadow was one of the first who immediately joined the efforts.

“There is so much to be done, but if each of us makes even a small contribution, we can really help Emmaus House,” Father Kraus said. “Father Garvey was an inspiration for us, helping the institution secure a grant to purchase a new van for picking up donations, and delivering them to those in need.”

The parishioners of Holy Trinity decided to gather food and other goods, serving as a collection point for other local parishes to send their donations for Emmaus House. One family has purchased new chairs for the kitchen, and after Christmas, other members will deliver a large supply of donated food to replenish the Emmaus House food pantry.

When the two priests realized no local clergy would be available to celebrate Christmas services at Emmaus House, they arranged for pre-feast Vespers to be celebrated Sunday afternoon, and members of the choir to join them, singing the appointed hymns. The staff and residents responded by hosting their guests with a simple meal and the singing of traditional Christmas carols.

The experience was inspirational for those members of Holy Trinity who visited Emmaus House. “We have every intention of sharing the good news about what we encountered with the other parishioners and parishes,” Father Kraus said. “We’re also considering the possibility of inviting Emmaus House residents and staff to visit our Long Island parish, so we can return their hospitality.”

Father Kraus plans on praying for each Emmaus House staff member and resident by name during Christmas services at Holy Trinity, asking for God’s blessings on their work.

Despite operating costs reaching hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, Father Kirk was able to run Emmaus House with the financial support and dedication of friends. The struggle for board members now is to maintain that support and find other funds to offset future expenses. “Helping others was the guiding principal of Father David’s life and he helped many people turn their lives around,” Father Garvey said, adding, “Even more importantly, it’s what Christ commanded each of us to do.”