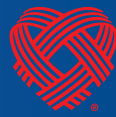


# The Br Alan & Emmaus Community Story



On the 13th of October 1991 during a visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy in Penrose Park, Alan dedicated himself to Our Lady and to the service of others.

He started volunteering at The Matthew Talbot Hostel in Kings Cross, Sydney, at that time a 500 bed hostel for homeless men. He would eventually serve as the Night Supervisor & Pastoral Carer for more than five years.

Br Alan said, *“Let me tell you, this is where I truly witnessed God at work, there with the homeless, the addicted, amongst the rejected of society, where violence, sadness and miracles happened every day”.*

In late 1995, Alan moved to Perth to be with and help his brother and young family. Alan was appointed manager of St Bartholomew's new Crisis Care Unit near Bentley, which provided emergency and short-term accommodation for people with mental health issues.

Alan met and befriended so many people battling mental illness during this time, people reaching out for help but with not enough beds to go around. They shared their collective experiences of homelessness, addiction, suffering, violence, of feeling alone and being lonely.

## Not a Hostel, not a Crisis Unit, a real Home!!

Accommodation for adults with mental health issues, where they could live independently, with support and assistance, whilst sharing the same journey.

In 1996 the spiritual journey of Emmaus began and in 2000, Alan sold a property he personally owned and from the proceeds, bought a modest house in Queens Park...

## ...and Emmaus Community was born.



Pictured left to right, top to bottom: Glen, Geradus, Ryan, Deborah Robinson (Support worker), Kevin, Margaret Connolly (Administration), Br Al, Russell, Michael, Alice, Dolores, and Patricia Gressieux (Co-ordinator).



Br Alan recalls *“I first met Archbishop Barry Hickey back in 2000, whilst seeking support for Emmaus Community. From almost the first minute we met, the Archbishop has been so wonderfully supportive. He is an amazing inspirational human being.*

*Over time, we got to know each other and I shared with the Archbishop my desire to formally dedicate myself to God, but not wanting to join an established Religious Order which would require committing myself to that Order's service, rather stay where I felt God had directed me – to living with and serving people with mental illness.*

*I was overjoyed when His Grace invited me to Consecrate myself directly to the service of the Catholic Archbishop of Perth, and continue living and working in Emmaus Community.*

- My first private vow was to Our Lady on the 13th of October 1991 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy in Penrose Park
- My temporary vows were taken on the 25 July 2007 at the Archbishop's Chapel (Nicknamed “The Palace”).
- And my final vows were taken on the 18 September 2008 at St Joseph's Church Queens Park .

*My vows are poverty, chastity, obedience and hospitality. To explain what that means to me is easy... I simply feel complete in the service of Christ as with all vocations; married life, single life, religious life all are called to their stitch on the tapestry...and all just as wonderful as the other. Whilst I am a consecrated brother... everybody, and I mean everybody, still just calls me “Al”...*

**...and that's exactly the way I like it”** he said.



The Three Amigos. Pictured Left to Right: Dave, “Big Al” and Dean.

I chat with some Members of the Emmaus Community. I ask the men about their experiences with Hostels, living on the streets, and what life is like now living as Community Members.

Dave, Dean and “Big Al” as he is jokingly referred to, live together in a house provided by Br “Little Al” Archer and the Emmaus Community. Despite being three very different people, these men share not only a home, but similar stories as well.

Dave (50) said *“My father committed suicide when I was younger and my mum remarried. My stepfather was pretty tough on me. My illness, Schizophrenia, started when I was 22 years old. I'd gotten heavily into the drink and drugs which brought my illness on much faster.*

*I've been in Heathcote, which is a nightmare. I've lived on the streets, which I'd prefer, rather than be forced to live at some of the Hostels they've sent me to. They are filthy, violent, drug filled places that serve rotten food”.*

Dean (34) said *“I was diagnosed at 20. I suffer from Bipolar Disorder. I'd been taking lots of different drugs with so called ‘friends’ which definitely made things worse. I've been to most of the Hostels and there's no privacy and they take all your money. You feel like nothing and it's a lonely place”.*

Big Al (50) added *“Yeah, I've been into marijuana and alcohol. It definitely made my illness occur earlier than it might have, but the drugs took the edge off my illness, so it's hard. The thing with Hostels I've been in is that there's no freedom, no privacy and they treat you like a number”.*

*“The good thing today is modern medications. They help us to control our illnesses and get on with life a lot better than 5, 10 or 20 years ago”* said Dave. Everyone agreed.

On the subject of Emmaus, Big Al perhaps summed it up by saying *“Without Br Alan and Emmaus, we'd be dead, that's for certain”.* Dave added *“We have a good place here, we all get on, we support each other. We have good food, we sleep well and that's really important to manage our health”.*



## I asked a final question:

If you could tell everyone in the world something about people with mental illness, what would you most like to say?

I think we'll leave the final words to Dean, the youngest of the group. His response was:

***“I want everyone to know that I'm not crazy, just a little bit unwell. We need help just like everyone does sometimes, so don't be afraid”.***

# LIFELINKS

issue number 17



LifeLink™ - CATHOLIC CARING AGENCIES  
61 Fitzgerald Street, Northbridge WA 6003

Telephone 08 9427 0311  
Facsimile 08 9427 0379

Email admin@lifelink.com.au  
Website www.lifelink.com.au

The material in this newsletter may be reused for school projects with our compliments

## WHEN THE Spirit Calls

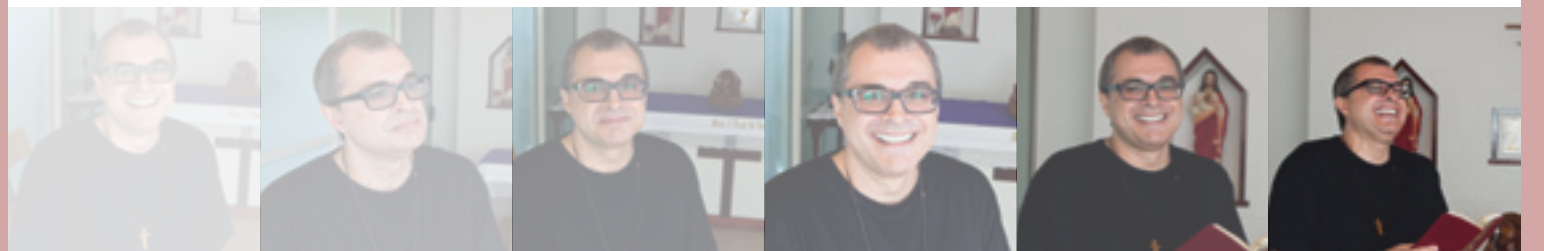


Pictured: Brother Al in the Emmaus Community Chapel.

Alan Archer was a successful man; a rock musician with his own band and co-owner of a recording studio in Sydney. He had travelled to Los Angeles with his nephew for an extended visit, largely to meet with prominent lawyers who were negotiating to sell his band's music, but also to enjoy all that LA had to offer.

Though his family were practicing Catholics, Alan admitted he hadn't been to Mass in many a year. So when his nephew, who did attend Mass every Sunday, urged him to join him on this particular weekend, it was more from boredom than devotion that led him to St Basil's Catholic Church in Mid-Wilshire L.A. this day.

This is where the life of Brother Alan Archer and Emmaus Community really begins.



***“During Mass, I was standing when all of a sudden I felt this overwhelming force hit me; it was so real, so physical, that I had to steady myself by holding onto a pew to stop from falling over.***

*I looked around and no one seemed to have noticed, so I asked my nephew whether he had just felt what had happened, and he said “no”. All I can tell you is that I felt this overwhelming, palpable feeling of my soul being filled to absolute capacity.*

*It wasn't until the next week that I went back to St Basils and shared my experience with an elderly priest who offered to hear my Confession, something I hadn't done in more than 20 years.*

*You know, after I had confessed my sins and asked for God's forgiveness, I felt so at peace. And this beautiful priest said to me welcome home.*

*It wasn't long after this that my nephew and I returned to Australia. Almost as the plane's wheels touched down, I knew from this moment on, I wanted to spend my life helping people. I didn't know how, I didn't know who and I didn't know where. But I just knew.*

*So I gave away my share of the studio and all the music to my nephew, and set out on whatever plan God had for me. Many people thought I was making a huge mistake, but I knew that life was about to become even more beautiful”* said Br Alan.





*We Warmly Welcome...*



**Emmaus Community was officially welcomed as an Archdiocesan Agency supported by LifeLink on 6 September 2011, and we are delighted to welcome Br Alan and everyone at Emmaus to our LifeLink family**

Emmaus Community was established in 1996 with just one house and six Members, today, the organisation has grown significantly.

Br Alan Archer and his wonderful staff provide long-term accommodation for approximately forty (40) Members who reside in one of eight (8) residential properties and support up to 150 family and friends of Emmaus associated with the community.



**Br Alan happily provided the following information so we all get to know a little more about this fantastic agency:**

Emmaus provides **long-term independent community based living for adults with mental illness**. It is a registered charitable organisation, as are all LifeLink supported agencies.

Community "Members" live together, support each other and take care of one another.

Emmaus Community is entirely separate from, but works closely with, the Public Mental Health Services and other relevant service providers.

The majority of Hostels require a person suffering from mental illness to contribute almost 98% of their fortnightly pension to receive accommodation and food. Some provide a token amount of 'spending money' to residents for incidentals and individual needs.

Emmaus Community currently charges just \$360 as a lodging fee per fortnight which provides the accommodation (including services such as electricity, gas etc) and three (3) quality meals per week plus food, clothes and medication support if required. Members manage their own finances after making their contribution to living expenses.

Members are aged 18-86 years and more than 50% have some form of employment, either permanent part-time, casual or are actively engaged in educational study.

The Community produces prayer and music CD's that are sold worldwide. One of the CD's has been written and performed by the community members with all artwork on the CD by the community. Br Al has decided to release all of the CD's on the website so that people can download them free. [www.emmauscommunity.com.au](http://www.emmauscommunity.com.au)

More information is available from Emmaus's new website at [www.emmauscommunity.com.au](http://www.emmauscommunity.com.au).

**Editor's Note:** Emmaus is currently planning to build up to 4 new houses to meet the overwhelming demand from people hoping to join the Community. Br Alan desperately needs King Size Beds or mattresses, Fitted KS sheet sets (new), art supplies, electrical items such as bar fridges, irons, toasters and anything for their homes. If you can help, call Emmaus today on telephone: (08) 9258 7333.

We All Need & Deserve



*Love...*



Pictured left to right: Anne, Brother Al and John.

**Editor's Introduction:** I spent the day visiting Emmaus Community Members in their homes. I'd not sat and chatted to anyone with mental illness before; what I discovered were a group of welcoming, courageous, talented, strong, and brutally honest men and women, people who every day battle illness, as well as a lack of public understanding and care.

John (48) is a brilliant, prolific artist and a passionate musician. Clinically diagnosed as suffering from Paranoid Schizophrenia, he has been with Emmaus for 9 years. He lives with 6 other Members in a cosy, clean, family home. With his constant companion, his dog Jack, we sit and chat.

John tells me: "I was 21 years old, deeply depressed when I first started hearing the voices. I'd jump out of bed and look outside, or run to the door to find out who was there. No one was. It became worse and worse. I turned to drugs and alcohol to quieten the noise. I was kicked out of home."

For almost 20 years, I lived a cycle of constantly being hospitalised for treatment, released to awful Hostels or I simply ended up back on the streets. It's hard to talk about; it's the past and things are so much better now. I have much better medication and I have learned a lot of meditation and coping strategies that really help me manage my condition.

A hospital nurse first told me about Emmaus. When I met Br Alan, good things started to happen for me. He makes sure we are all ok. He found me this home and helped me find a casual job. I worked at the St Norbert's School helping with maintenance for 6 years but I had to give that up recently 'cause I've been sick.

In this house, I have my own room where I paint, play music and write songs. I like living here because we all support each other, we look after each other and there is always someone around to chat to or to help if you need it.

We are all different, but we all understand and we care.

If it wasn't for Emmaus and Br Al, I don't know what I'd do. I am living my life and making decisions about how my life will be.

**"I'm happy now, you know?"** he said.



Pictured: John playing guitar in the company of his dog, Jack.



Anne (a young looking, well, let's say 60+) is well known in Queen's Park. "The Lollipop Lady" as everyone calls her, loved helping children across the road on their way to school, something she did for almost 5 years. The children loved her because she'd always greet them with a big smile and was happy to have a chat.

What most people didn't know is that Anne has battled severe depression for more than 40 years.

Born in England, at age 25, she started feeling deeply depressed. "I'd see black clouds literally following me around and I was crying all the time. In those days, the treatment was shock therapy and powerful drugs. It really was awful" Anne said.

"In 1977 my husband insisted we immigrate to Australia, despite having two young children and my illness to deal with. It wasn't a happy marriage. He was very controlling and didn't care for me. I had no money, no job, no savings. I had no one here to lean on.

All I had was my Faith. The marriage ended when my husband told me one day to choose him or the Church. **I chose God!**

I've spent years in and out of hospital seeking treatment for my condition. I still managed to raise my children though, who are now happily married with children of their own I'm proud to say. They are still the most important part of my life.

I found Emmaus and Br Alan when a nurse told me about them whilst I was recovering from yet another hospital stay. That was 5 years ago. I lived here in this home for over a year now.

We all get along so well, there's no one telling you what you can do, and can't do, we have privacy and we all do our own thing. But what's even better is that when we need it, we have friends here to chat to, to lean on, to support us on our bad days. This really is my home and we are all a family.

Everybody loves Br Alan. He is the most caring man in the world. I don't know where we'd be without him and Emmaus Community. I thank God for sending him to us" said Anne.



Pictured: John and Anne's comfortable home



**Editor's Special Note:** Anne would dearly love to find someone very important to her that she lost contact with many years ago, a nurse - Wendy Sullivan from EIRE in Ireland. If you can help, if you have family or friends in EIRE, Anne would be thrilled to make contact with Wendy. Please call Emmaus Community on telephone 9258 7333.