
London, Farm Street opens its doors to homeless persons. Jesuits and volunteers welcome persons in need

Every Wednesday and Saturday morning, at exactly 11.30am, Ade Owusu-Ansah stands outside the entrance door to Farm Street church, run by the Jesuits in Mayfair, an affluent area in the heart of London, to welcome homeless persons in need of shelter from the cold and the perils of the city. Ade, 56, enjoyed a successful career as manager of a famous commercial warehouse downtown. Until the layoffs during the pandemic left her with plenty of time to spare. The chance to do volunteer work for the most disadvantaged people opened the doors to a new life



"I used spend the entire day trying to make money, no matter how, because that's what the world I worked in was all about. I wasn't experiencing any form of human fulfillment. Now the smiles of the people I help give a new, deeper meaning to my life," she told SIR. "Also the way I felt about homeless persons - many of whom are university graduates and have had a career themselves - has changed. I learned that they are persons just like myself. So I decided to take early retirement and devote myself full-time to voluntary work. Now I feel at peace with myself for the first time, and I wonder how I could work in such a harsh environment for so many years." "Not all of our guests are homeless," Ade explains, "but in most cases these are people who have nothing to eat and come to us for that reason. And that's not the only reason. They also want to escape loneliness, to be integrated, to find a warm and welcoming environment where they can feel they belong. Some of them arrive with a suitcase and ask if they can take a warm shower. Others ask for clothes or for help in filling out a benefit application form." **Catholics, Anglicans, Jews together.** "The idea of starting a homeless outreach service emerged during the pandemic because everything was closed and these people had nowhere to go," says the former manager. "They were not allowed into shops, cafes or even churches. In the first weeks of 2020, representatives of all religious communities, including Catholics, Anglicans and Jews, gathered in Trafalgar Square to offer a warm meal, tea, coffee and sandwiches, as well as hygiene items for the homeless. Catholic volunteers included members of three different churches, in addition to Farm Street, Saint Patrick church, located in Soho Square, and Saint James church, in Marylebone, all united together to form the "Central London Catholic Churches." **No State aid, but plenty of generosity.** Between August and September 2020, once the pandemic had eased, the homeless service was relocated for six weeks to Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Warwick Street, where guests could also enjoy a warm shower. Regrettably,

only five people at a time could be taken in, because the volunteers were required to wear anti-Covid protective equipment and had to thoroughly clean the rooms, which was a time-consuming job. However, those who were admitted were also helped with job and benefit applications as well as visa application forms required to remain in the UK. Each of these three Catholic churches in central London has been welcoming homeless persons at different days and hours for more than two years now. " Sadly, the government does not help us, also because we are not a charity registered at the competent commission. Local authorities encourage us, but they don't grant us any subsidies. We can only rely on donations from private individuals, which have been forthcoming until now," says Ade Owusu-Ansah. "At Farm Street, the parishioners are very generous and we also promote a number of fundraising events." **Fish and chips and pizza.** The food served is top quality. On Wednesdays, when there are more than sixty guests, the volunteers serve the traditional "fish and chips", cooked by one of London's finest restaurants, the "Mayfair Chippy", while on Saturdays the five-star deluxe "Connaught Hotel", located right across the street from the church on Farm Street, provides a roast and even a cake or fruit. Some forty guests normally arrive when pizza is served. **Hospitality, discretion and respect.** They can find checkers, chess, board games like Monopoly, someone who listens to them carefully and sympathetically, and a chance to express their feelings through creative writing. "At Farm Street, guests can talk about their problems if they wish," Ade explains. "But we don't insist they do. We want to welcome them discreetly and respectfully without making them feel that they are being judged or pressured to reopen old wounds." Two mini-workshops with employers were also organised for the homeless at Farm Street in April and August in partnership with Westminster Council, the local authority in central London, and with Veolia, a French multinational water, energy and recycling company. The next event is planned for January 25 and it will be organised by 'Astrea management', a financial consultancy company specialising in sustainable investments. Five guests have already found a job thanks to the help received from these companies' experts.

Silvia Guzzetti from London