

Operation Stephen Report for AGM 2018

Operation Stephen was named after the man appointed by Jesus' disciples to help feed the needy in the early church. In offering a breakfast and welcome on Saturday mornings it is our aim to provide a similar service to those in need in Versailles: principally the homeless and those who live on the margins of established society. In this we complement other associations in the Versailles area, which provide basic needs for these people. Christina Galley attends the regular meetings organised by social services for representatives of the Versailles associations which work with the homeless.

We can only hope to help our guests in a small way, but hopefully by providing a consistent service we provide a little stability and loving care to their lives. The numbers of guests fluctuates, from a handful to up to 15. Because of the small scale format, meaningful contact with the guests is possible in a way that is not with the larger "soup kitchen", and many of us have a friendly relationship with them.

We held our first breakfast at St Mark's in October 2002, and have been running continuously virtually every Saturday since then. Since 2006 we have had the additional support of volunteers from our neighbouring Roman Catholic churches Saint Michel in Porchefontaine and the Eglise du Nazaréen in rue du Peintre Lebrun, Versailles. It is a great pleasure to work with these people from other churches, and also those who do not attend any church.

Currently we have 18 volunteers on our core roster, with several loyal and long-serving members stepping down from the team in 2017 and some newcomers joining. We have 13 from St Marks and St Pauls, 4 from Saint Michel, one from l'Eglise du Nazaréen. The Operation Stephen team is always interested in potential new volunteers so that we can offer this breakfast every Saturday of the year.

We have teams of 4 on duty every Saturday led by the 'chef', who is responsible for unlocking and locking up, and buying the bread. Other team members often bring extra items such as croissants, cake or fruit. One volunteer, Laurence, occasionally attends to cut guests hair. Our 'chefs' begin the breakfast with a short prayer at the table. Guests, even non-Christians, respect this prayer time.

In late 2017 the Operation Stephen teams started a new approach to collect 'unsold' bread from two bakeries in Versailles Porchefontaine for the breakfast. This saves money and also is a good way to avoid food waste. This also aligns with certain tax benefits that bakeries can receive for passing on unsold food.

Over the past year there have not been any issues of arguments or violence amongst guests which led to disciplinary measures (e.g. banning guests).

The end of 2017 was marked by the passing of Marco, a regular guest in previous years, who passed away in his lorry where he slept on 31 December 2017.

Thank you to all these volunteers and especially Karen Kendall who does our shopping and keeps the kitchen in order.

Dan Roulstone