

A New Ministry at Notre Dame de France – Sanctuary on the Square

Catherine Jones SMSM (far left in team picture) and Kevin Mowbray SM write from London.

There is a new name in the life of Notre Dame de France in London: Sanctuary on the Square. This is the name chosen for a new ministry here at NDF which began early May after several years of discernment and planning.

Sanctuary on the Square, staffed by a team of volunteers (and still recruiting), offers women a space at Maison Pierre Chanel where they can relax and feel at home in a friendly and confidential environment.

Open every Wednesday afternoon, our guests can enjoy an afternoon of relaxation and friendship around a cup of tea and a bite to eat. There is also a supervised children's play corner, so women can bring their youngsters with them. Some have been happy just to sit and read a magazine, chat with a volunteer or another guest; others have taken part in recreational activities. There is plenty of laughter – and there have also been some tears.

"To feel at home in a friendly confidential environment where women are welcome to rest awhile, have a cup of tea, read a magazine and chat with someone"

Maison Pierre Chanel
16 Leicester square

Through the blue door opposite Burger King

The volunteers at this stage offer their hospitality and a listening ear, and we are gradually building up a file of referral services (counselling, housing, mental health, etc.) when needed. We are hoping to have enough volunteers to keep the Sanctuary open over the July-August summer holidays, aware that many other services are closed at that time, yet it is also a difficult time for many of the women we hope to serve.

Sanctuary on the Square has been going for just over a month now, and each week we are surprised at the diversity and giftedness of the women who call in, and how they heard of the centre. We have a strong conviction that God's providence is at work in this little initiative, and ask for your prayers. Do call in on a Wednesday afternoon if you are in London!

It is a very Marist place to be in an attitude of attentive listening and presence to all who come, of being where something new is coming to birth. It is also a collaborative effort as there are Marists from three branches - Society of Mary, Marist Sisters (Carmel Reynolds SM) and SMSM.

Catherine Jones, smsm, (volunteer), Kevin Mowbray, SM (accompaniment)