

Giuseppe Conlon House – Information for Prospective Live-in Volunteers

Who we are

Giuseppe Conlon House strives to be a house of hospitality for refugees and asylum seekers, a community of disciples working for the poor, love, peace, and justice in the world, a place of prayer and Christian witness.

The London Catholic Worker, the group which runs and is based in Giuseppe Conlon House, is part of the international Catholic Worker movement founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in New York City in 1933. The aim of the movement is to “live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ”. Our “rule of life” is dedicated to the practice of the works of mercy: the corporal ones - to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, and bury the dead - as well as the 'spiritual works of mercy' - a life of radical discipleship.

Giuseppe Conlon House is completely self-run and does not receive money from the government. As a community, we live from donations and work voluntarily. As guests and volunteers, we are a community of usually between 15 and 20 people. We are not here simply to provide services but more profoundly to share God's love and compassion; to “create a new society in the shell of the old”.

What we believe

The Catholic Worker believes
in the gentle personalism
of traditional Christianity.

The Catholic Worker believes
in the personal obligation
of looking after
the needs of our sisters and brothers.

The Catholic Worker believes
in the daily practice
of the Works of Mercy.

The Catholic Worker believes
in Houses of Hospitality
for the immediate relief
of those who are in need.

The Catholic Worker believes
in creating a new society
within the shell of the old
with the philosophy of the new,
which is not a new philosophy
but a very old philosophy,
a philosophy so old
that it looks like new.

- Peter Maurin, “What the Catholic Worker Believes” (slightly updated)

What we do

Giuseppe Conlon House offers hospitality to destitute men without recourse to public funds – people not eligible to receive money from the government. Most of the time, this means working with migrants, including refugees.

As part of our response to the Gospel and commitment to the common good we participate in and help to organise movements and events that work towards establishing solidarity, peace and (eco-)justice. Our community has campaigned for nuclear disarmament, against wars, against the climate crisis, in solidarity with migrants on the move into Europe, among other things.

As a Christian community, prayer is at the heart of all that we do. We have daily prayer in our chapel and often invite our wider community to join us.

Expectations for volunteers

Time

We usually ask for an initial commitment of 6-12 months; exceptions will be considered on an individual basis. You will be able to leave at any time you want, and in exceptional circumstances the community has the right to ask you to leave at any time.

Volunteers can take one day off a week and are expected to work roughly 40 hours for the rest of the week. Your time will be mostly self-managed. Working here is a full-time job, so it is not usually possible to combine it with external paid work or studies.

Work

The bulk of the work is practical housekeeping, organising and administration. You can expect a varied combination of DIY, office work, accompanying guests, cooking and cleaning, and organising events and vigils. There is also quite a lot of carrying things around.

We are not trained caseworkers or lawyers and do not generally do casework – helping the guests most often involves helping them to engage with services and institutions such as lawyers, doctors, the Home Office and the DWP. At times you will have to insist that the rules of the house are followed, and you need to commit to informing other volunteers about guests in an objective way.

Activism is an integral part of the work of the community; you will need to be open to engaging in protest, such as at our regular vigils outside places of power. You should never feel pressure to do anything you are uncomfortable with.

You will receive board and lodging, plus £40 a week in expenses. We expect you to arrange your own travel to and from London but can assist with travel within the UK in cases of need. We are unable to sponsor visas.

Community

You will be living with adult homeless men – you will need to feel at ease in living together with men of different backgrounds and cultures. We expect a commitment to living as part of the community of guests and volunteers. This includes regularly joining the house's meals, contributing to a good atmosphere at the table and in the house, and being active in engaging the guests in friendship (they are probably not interested in your opinions on church politics but probably are interested in your football team). You'll also need to be open to joining the community in regular prayer.

You will need to be open to guidance, advice, and constructive criticism while having the right to expect to feel supported by your fellow volunteers.

We have space for storing bikes but not for cars; the community has a car to use when necessary.

Application

We welcome all volunteers of any gender, sexuality, race, or ethnic background, and of any age over 18. We welcome those of any faith or none who are comfortable taking part in the Christian prayer of the house. People with mental and physical disabilities are welcome, although the house is unfortunately not accessible to those unable to use stairs. Living in community also requires a degree of mental robustness and emotional maturity.

You will need to complete the application form and provide 3 references. You will then have at least one meeting by phone or video with a member of the community, who can clarify anything unclear from the application and who you can ask any questions about the community. Where possible, you will need to visit the house for a weekend or longer as part of the application process. We will require a criminal record check from your home country, although a criminal record is not necessarily disqualifying.

Before you arrive, it's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the history and ethos of the Catholic Worker movement. We recommend *Loaves and Fishes* or *Selected Writings* by Dorothy Day, or *A Penny a Copy*, a compilation of articles from the *New York Catholic Worker*.