



St Matthew, Redhill Food Bank

The food bank at St Matthew, Redhill, has been helping people in food poverty since 2012 when Maureen and Peter James, members of St Matthew's congregation, had the idea to begin the project. They began by storing food in a small cupboard at the back of the church; now, in order to meet demand, the food bank has to use two Portakabins in the church car park for storage.

Clients are referred to the food bank by the local council or other local agencies such as Welcare, the Diocese of Southwark organisation that works with families and children. This may be for a number of different reasons including benefit delay, redundancy, sudden illness, an unexpected bill, bereavement, or because clients' income is too low to enable them to make ends meet. St Matthew's food bank aims, without judgement, to provide local families and individuals with essential food supplies to keep them going until a longer-term solution can be found.

It is an independent charity which is also a part of the life of the church, and has more than 40 volunteers, all of whom work together to help to feed more than 100 households per week. The average cost of a food parcel for each household is £30.

David, who has been supported by the food bank, says: "I was in a desperate situation after going without food for six weeks and the food bank deliveries to my home helped saved my life. The volunteers do a magnificent job and I can't thank them enough. Without them I would not be here today. They have given me confidence and hope to carry on."

St Matthew's food bank offers 93 types of food, depending on a household's requirements. Each week it receives donations of around £2,200 worth of food but even this is not enough to meet the continued rise in need.

The members of the food bank say that demand keeps on going up, especially during the pandemic, even though Surrey is the second wealthiest county in the UK: hidden poverty is an acute problem in the local community, and the work of the food bank in Redhill is a reminder that there is need everywhere, something that is important to remember when thinking about and praying for our parishes. The fact that the food bank operates out of the church helps to ensure that those who worship there are very much aware of what is happening in the local area and this helps to focus prayer and action.



A visit to the St Matthew food bank from the Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey, Mr Michael More-Molyneux.

The food bank also helps the church to reach out to, and to become more of a part of, the local community. As a result there has been incredible support and regular donations from local businesses, schools and other community organisations. Dedicated local fundraisers have also helped in generating donations.

The work of St Matthew's food bank carried on through the COVID lockdowns and need continues to be acute. Despite regular gifts of food and goods, more are needed each week. As a result, the food bank buys in an extra £700 of food each week and a further £200 of fresh food so that households can be helped.

The food is sorted by three volunteers, three times a week, who make up bags of different sizes for those who live alone, couples, families of four and families of more than four. Nappies and other items needed by individual families are added at the point of distribution and a small treat is added to each bag.

The food is sorted in one building and distributed from the church so 150 boxes of food are moved around church premises each week, with a total of 13 volunteers involved in packing and giving out the food and other household goods. The food bank offers the service three times a week. Where necessary, parcels are delivered to those who, for whatever reason, are unable to visit the premises.

As well as the practical help that the food bank gives to those in need, the volunteers provide a much-needed listening ear for people experiencing difficulties. For some, the volunteers at the food bank are the only people they see or feel they can confide in. Such help is part of the way in which the church at St Matthew's can provide a support structure for those in need in their area.

Another of the food bank's clients, single mum Sandra, says: "The food bank staff are amazing. My family and I would not have survived without them over lockdown."

Please pray for those involved in working at the food bank at St Matthew, Redhill and those who use the service. Give thanks for their work and pray for justice so that those who are in need can return to being able to support themselves. If you can give to support the work of the food bank, please consider doing so through the Bishop of Southwark's Lent Call: southwark.anglican.org/lentcall