

WGC Catholic Parishes' Open Meeting 2017

Minutes

Date: Monday 18th September 2017 **Venue:** Our Lady's Parish Hall
Chaired by: Father Norbert
Present: Approx 45 parishioners, Ellen Allardice (Minutes)

1. Welcome

Fr. Norbert opened the meeting at 7.30pm with the prayer. He welcomed Fr. Tom Montgomery, who started as Assistant Priest two weeks ago. Fr. Norbert then presented the agenda and asked if there were any other items to be added. No additions were requested.

2. Update on Parish Hall Project for WGC (Paul Chappell, member of the Project Group)

Paul recapped that the Open Meeting last year discussed the proposed new build which at that time was deemed too expensive, so the possibility of refurbishing the existing building was recommended to be explored.

This process has found that as a refurbishment will need to include VAT, the final costs will be as much or even more than a new build (which does not incur VAT charges). Therefore, it has been concluded that the approach should be to investigate a new build project within a viable budget. A revised plan of a smaller new building will be drawn up for feedback. Current use of the Hall can continue and it is anticipated that there will be plenty of notice when the building will commence as planning permission is expected to be a lengthy process.

It has been disappointing and frustrating process, and requires ongoing patience by all to ensure the right outcome for the parishes.

Fr. Norbert recapped the financial information, the cost of a 'dream' new build was estimated as £1.25 million. The quantity surveyor's report for the refurbishment option was £945,000.

Chris Fanning has recommended a starting point of £800,000 for a new build. At present, the generous donations of parishioners to the Growing in Faith Project which started 3.5 years ago, will provide £250,000 towards the costs when this initiative finishes in 1.5 years. After this, it is hoped that some parishioners will continue their contributions with the full amount going towards the Hall project. The Chairs of the Finance Committees had met with Chris Fanning to ensure that a loan would be available from the Diocese for the project.

The following questions were asked:

- Will use of the new Parish Hall be charged at a commercial rent basis?

As it will not be VAT rated, it is deemed a community space and therefore not a commercial enterprise.

- How much smaller will the new build be?

We are waiting for the architects to provide a new plan. There will be a more efficient use of space, and as the current footprint is not fully utilised, it is hoped a smaller building will not have a negative impact.

- How will the new Hall be managed?

It is too early to determine detail of management, oversight will be carried out by representatives from all three parishes.

Fr. Norbert thanked the project team for their efforts and asked everyone to let others know the current stage of the project. Once the design for the smaller hall has been drafted, a copy will be on display at each of the three churches for parishioners to provide feedback.

3. Tower repairs at Holy Family Church (Fr. Norbert)

Planning permission is being sought from the Welwyn Hatfield Council.

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4. Finance Committees

Copies of the Annual Financial Accounts for 2015-2016 for the three parishes had been distributed to attendees on arrival at the meeting.

Rob Brand (Our Lady's Finance Committee Chair) introduced himself, named the other members of the committee and outlined the various projects undertaken at Our Lady's such as refurbishment of the benches.

John Blackburn (Holy Family Finance Committee Secretary) introduced himself and named the other members of the committee. He noted that following the latest appeal, collection income has risen. The kneelers at Holy Family Church are soon to be refurbished.

Fr. Norbert spoke on behalf of St Bonaventure's Finance Committee. A number of projects were undertaken in preparation for the celebration of the 90th Anniversary of the church including the renovation of the garden and sanding of the church floor.

Fr. Norbert advised that there are benchmarking reports where parishes are compared with others in the Deanery and other similar parishes in the Diocese. Fr. Norbert stated that he has considered it important to focus on the spiritual life of the parish and invest in people. There are currently at least 1,000 parishioners across the three parishes, so we are sustaining numbers coming to the three parishes.

A question was asked on the current arrangement for the funding of the Parish Hall; currently costs for the Hall are paid for by Our Lady's Parish. Once the building work for the new Hall begins, careful consideration of sharing of ongoing costs will have to be carried out.

Fr. Norbert thanked the members of the three Finance Committees for their efforts.

5. Updates from Parish Groups

- Bereavement Support Group (Anna Grogan)

Setting up a Bereavement Support Group came as a result of discussions in the Parish Advisory Council and taking on board needs and suggestions expressed by several members of our church communities. At present, 8 members have had 2 meetings and their aim is to provide pastoral care and be available to listen and provide support to individuals and families who are caring for those who are dying/terminally ill and for those who are bereaved. Sympathy cards will be sent on behalf of the parish with details for contacting the group members. There will be a Memorial Service on Saturday 4th November at 12noon in St. Bonaventure's, with personal invitations being sent to the families of those who have died in the past year and a general invitation to all in the Newsletter. Members of the group will also be available at the Blessing of the Graves also in November. Anyone who would like further information or would like to help, please do get in touch.

- Transport to Mass

Fr. Norbert advised that there is an update from the Transport Group in the current Newsletter, this initiative was started as a result of reflection on the themes of the Year of Mercy last year.

- CAFOD (Bridie Nash)

The CAFOD group at Holy Family started in 1971 and over this time has raised approximately £100,000 for CAFOD projects. They have a target amount of £3500 per year, which has been exceeded this year. The current project is supporting a community in Ethiopia. Main fundraising events are a summer BBQ and Strawberry tea and an Advent Fair and Raffle at Christmas.

- St. Vincent de Paul Society, SVP (Janet Lewis)

The SVP meet fortnightly on Thursday evenings at 7.45pm at St Bonaventure's Parish Hall. They primarily visit and befriend people and sometimes provide financial support. Currently there are 7

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members and 15 auxiliary members visiting over 70 clients. New members are needed. Referrals are from a variety of places and the clients they befriend have different needs. Everyone greets members with gratitude, and the group are thankful for the support of parishioners with donations of money, toys etc. Fr. Norbert added that the SVP organise the annual Mass of the Anointing of the Sick followed by a tea in the Parish Hall.

- Catholic Women's League, CWL (Ann O'Keefe)

The motto of the Catholic Women's League are Charity, Work and Loyalty. Members suggest charities to donate to at an annual meeting and fund-raising initiatives include Lenten Lunches, weekly coffee mornings, quizzes and a stall at the community fun day. Members also work in a variety of ways to support parish life including: flower arranging, catechists, ministers and hospitality. Members are always willing to help. The loyalty of the CWL is visible from the active ways in which the local CWL groups interact with each other in spiritual gatherings and social events. Members can attend an annual national Conference. New members are always welcome.

- Hospitality Group (Ann Chappell)

The Hospitality group are parishioners who have expressed an interest in helping with various parish events. An email reminder is sent prior to the event asking for volunteers who have spare time to help with setting up, changing table layouts, welcoming those who bring food to events, providing refreshments and clearing up. Ann thanked all those involved in these activities.

- Friends of Welwyn Care Homes (Anne Horsman)

The group started in 2011 and is an ecumenical group that wished to help meet the spiritual needs of older people. Their aim is to bring community into care homes and care homes into the community. They started by having tea parties in the local care homes, and currently have 30 volunteers with 6 parishioners on the committee. Their motto is 'friendship, companionship and laughter'.

- Peace Garden (Anne Stapleton)

The Peace Garden at Our Lady's was founded in 2012 as part hosting the Peace Icon in readiness for the Olympic Games being held in London. It has developed from this time with parishioners contributing their time and talents, currently there are 3 helpers. A painting of St Francis provides a focus of God's love of Creation. The aim of the Peace Garden is to create a place for people to gather, a very simple place with a welcoming atmosphere.

- Tuesday Group (Kathryn Hubbard)

There are a number of groups for children: all three parishes have Children's Liturgy groups and there is a 'Mums and Toddlers Group' organised by the mums on Wednesday mornings at St. Bonaventure's.

The Tuesday Group is a Children's group which meets on a Tuesday afternoon at 3.45pm – 4.45pm and started 25 years ago for children who were not attending Catholic schools. Now children attend from all schools. Activities include story-telling, crafts and there are also visits to McDonalds, a fireworks party and a Nativity play.

- Hosanna House & Children's Pilgrimage Trust, HCPT (Martin Moore)

HCPT is a charity that aims to enable those who may need help, especially the young, to experience pilgrimage to Lourdes in small caring groups. Emma Moore is the group leader for WGC Parishes' Group 183. The group started in 2013 and takes disabled and disadvantaged children to Lourdes at Eastertide accompanied by Fr. Norbert and helpers. Fundraising is carried out throughout the year with all monies raised going towards the children (helpers pay their own costs). The group are grateful for donations received from parishioners.

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- Rite of Initiation of Christian Adults, RCIA (Eveline Guerin)

This will be the 10th year with Fr. Norbert leading a group of people who have expressed an interest in learning more about the Catholic Faith. There are currently three catechists working with Fr. Norbert helping to support people in this journey. People who have been baptised and not confirmed also come along to learn more about their Faith. Please do encourage anyone who may be interested to attend.

- Focolare (Focolare members)

The Focolare are an international movement with the aim of working cooperatively to build a more united world following the inspiration of Jesus, the motto being 'may they all be one'. The Focolare Centre for Unity is on Parkway beside St. Bonaventure's and hosts the Movement's ecumenical and interfaith activities, as well as being used for educational purposes by the NHS and local authority groups. Approximately 5000 people visit the Centre every year.

- Safeguarding (Ann Chappell)

Each parish has a safeguarding representative, whose role is to ensure that procedures are followed with regard to interaction with vulnerable groups within the parishes, creating an environment where all feel safe and nurtured. Various online training is also available for parish volunteers who are involved with people from vulnerable groups. Posters are on display in each of the churches with contact information of the Safeguarding Officers:

St. Bonaventure's : Cathy Staniforth; Our Lady's: Barbara Moore; Holy Family: Ann Chappell

Fr. Norbert added that Level 2 & 3 Safeguarding training for Clergy and Religious is taking place on 19th September in Our Lady's Parish Hall.

- Health and Safety (Fr. Norbert)

Fr. Norbert advised that the Electrical 5-yearly Survey was completed last week in each of the three churches and the reports are expected soon.

Fr. Norbert thanked everyone for their contributions and said that there are many other groups who also contribute to parish life. So much good is going on, so much giving especially to those who are in need and the vulnerable. It is hoped that the Website can be updated with this information. He said that looking at the year ahead, the key project will be the Parish Hall, but this meeting has highlighted that there are always new ideas and initiatives coming forward.

A question was asked about the pastoral provision for young people. Fr. Norbert said that this is continually being reviewed and a number of initiatives to engage with young people have been carried out. Last year, the parishes financed 7 young people from the WGC parishes to attend the World Youth Day in Krakow. We continue to look for ways to show our willingness to let young people know they are welcome and work towards keeping their connection with the church.

6. Closing Prayer

The meeting closed at 8.55pm with a prayer led by Fr. Tom.