

## Welwyn Garden City Open Parish Meeting 2023 Minutes

Date: Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2023      Venue: Trinity Hall  
Chaired by: Canon Norbert Fernandes  
Present: Fr. Marco Salvagnini, Mrs Jacqui Boon (Parish Administrator)  
Approximately 45 parishioners, Maria Vargas (Minutes)

### Welcome

Canon Norbert opened the meeting at 8pm with a prayer. He spoke briefly of the recent history of our parish. He talked about the Parish Advisory Council which had been made up of volunteers from the three churches who met regularly to discuss parish matters before Covid 19. During the lockdown Canon Norbert took responsibility to keep everyone safe and for this reason he made the decisions. Post pandemic numbers who attend the parish are down across the diocese and it is difficult to get volunteers, so we must find a new way to continue in the future. During lockdown the new hall, Trinity Hall was built. One the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 following consultation at various levels Welwyn Garden City parishes were decreed by the Cardinal to be one canonical parish. Donations to church funds have been simplified through the increase in standing orders and contactless donations using the DONA machines situated at the back of the churches.

### Reports from Parish Groups

Ann Stewart spoke about the **Catholic Women's League** (CWL). It is an international organisation which began in 1906. Within the parish the group meet socially and engage in fund raising activities to support the parish. They have a weekly coffee morning every Thursday at 10.30am and monthly meetings on the second Tuesday of each month. Recently they have raised funds for Ukraine and to support the Medaille Trust which helps victims of modern day slavery.

Bridie Nash spoke on behalf of **CAFOD**. She began by thanking parishioners for their generosity in previous campaigns. Money raised is used throughout the world, currently helping the people of Gaza and Israel, supporting families in those areas. The group meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 2pm at the Church of the Holy Family. Donations can be made online as well as during the envelope campaigns.

Martin Moore spoke about **The Catenians**, which is a charitable group of Catholic men who meet in the evening of the second Tuesday of each month at Homestead Court Hotel. They are currently raising money for the local HCPT group.

The **St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP)** was represented by Janet Lewis. She explained that it is a worldwide organisation who supports anyone in need, through poverty, mental health issues, those who are housebound or lonely and isolated, and their carers. They provide practical help such as lifts to the church for the Anointing of the Sick Mass. At Christmas those in need will receive supermarket vouchers or a present. They would welcome anyone interested in volunteering to join the group.

Margaret Green talked about **Focolare**. Their Centre for Unity is situated in Parkway next to St Bonaventure's Church. People within the Focolare Movement come from all walks of life. Some lead a consecrated life, others have jobs within society. Their purpose is to bring unity between people. They host many events throughout the year, events are posted in the newsletter. The next one will be Ecumenical Carols to which everyone is invited. They will be hosting a Lenten art exhibition and workshop entitled "Deepening the Mystery". Posters and leaflets with information will be at the back of the churches.

**The Polish Community** was represented by Iwona Pniewska and Anna Skiba. They talked about the Polish Saturday School which currently has 130 pupils. It teaches history, geography and language to children of Polish families. They organise a Polish/English Mass every year, followed by food, dancing and enjoying each other's company in Trinity Hall, to which everyone is invited. There is also a Blessing of Food service held at Our Lady's Church at 4pm on Holy Saturday which is very well attended.

Barbara Moore spoke about the local **HCPT group 183**. It has been running for 10 years and takes children with special needs to Lourdes from Easter Monday to the following Saturday. They raise funds by arranging activities such as Quiz nights because the cost per child is £800. They currently need 2-3 more helpers in order to make the trip next year. Volunteers pay their own fare. The children get tremendous joy from the experience and it enables parents to spend more time with other members of the family while the children are in Lourdes.

Anne Maclean-Eltham helps to co-ordinate the **Transport to Mass** group. She currently has 5 regular drivers and others who help informally. She welcomes new volunteers who feel they can offer their services.

Joy Burrows-Gee spoke about the annual **Filipino Mass** which is held at Our Lady's Church. Many of those who participate wear national costumes. The Mass is a celebration of Filipino culture and there is a party afterwards with food, singing, dancing and much merriment.

Elke Springett, a parishioner, works for **Caritas** in the Westminster Diocese. This organisation helps to connect volunteers with groups who need voluntary help. They run an "Introduction to Volunteering" event. They get involved in schools and parishes. They support women who have been trafficked or exploited by providing a safe house, Bakhita House. They also run the Deaf Service which provides signed Masses at the Cathedral once a month and within parishes whenever possible. Here in WGC we have 2-3 signed Masses per year. The next one will be on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December at 11.30am in Our Lady's Church.

We also hold **Special Needs Masses** a few times a year followed by a party with quiz, Bingo and a chance to provide mutual support to families.

We have an annual **African Mass** held in July which is a colourful and fun filled occasion.

Mary Stephenson talked about **Safeguarding**. This is a statutory requirement for every diocese. We have three representatives who work as a team within the parish, Mary, Cathy Staniforth, and Ann Chappell. Contact details are on posters at the back of the churches. Anyone involved in young or vulnerable people are required to have Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) every three years. Those involved should contact one of the representatives if they need renewal.

Susan Read oversees the bookings at **Trinity Hall**. The hall held its first event in November 2022, and it is an excellent venue for events such as the after Mass parties, organised by the Polish, Filipino and African communities. There is a good space outside the hall when weather permits and the building also has an office and committee room. The hall can be booked online at any time between 8.30am and 10pm unless it is being used by the parish for a pre-booked meeting. Groups currently using the hall regularly are "Ladies over 50 Keep Fit", "Ballroom Dancing" on Wednesdays and the "Somewhere to Sing" group on a Friday. There is a maintenance company responsible for opening and closing of the hall and a deep clean after each event.

## **Finance**

Fr Norbert has appointed Bill Hayes as Chair of the new Finance Committee (single) and a new committee will be formed soon. The three accounts are to be combined into one joint account. Bill noted that the annual collection pre Covid across all 3 churches was £140,000. In 2021 and 2022 the sum was lower £120,000. The new hall cost £850,000. With contribution from the Growing in Faith fund and generous donations we currently owe £220,000 which must be repaid over the next 10 years.

In the future we may need to do fundraising to repay the loan on the hall. For the moment it is important that people who contribute to the parish by standing order change to the new WGC joint churches account, and complete a new gift aid form if appropriate.

Canon Norbert told us that there is a shortage of priests within the diocese and it may not be possible to have a daily Mass at some time in the future. So we must be flexible and open to change. There are parts of the diocese which have no priest at all.

He noted that there are new parishioners and visitors coming to Mass every Sunday and we should be aware and offer them a warm welcome.

He thanked all those who volunteer in helping within the parish. He hopes to resume the Children's Liturgy in all three churches once the DBS certificates have been processed.

Sadly the pilgrimage to the Holy Land has been cancelled because of the conflict in Israel this year, but he said that pilgrimage is an important part of parish life so there will be others in the future, of course.

Fr Marco stated that he is happy to be a part of our parish.

### **Closing prayer**

The meeting closed at 9.30pm with the Lord's Prayer led by Fr Norbert