

Welwyn Garden City Open Parish Meeting 2024 Minutes

Date: Sunday 27th October 2024 Venue: Trinity Hall
Chaired by: Canon Norbert Fernandes
Present: Fr. Marco Salvagnini, Mrs Jacqui Boon (Parish administrator)
Approximately 60 parishioners, Maria Vargas (Minutes)

Welcome

Canon Norbert opened the meeting at 7.30pm with a prayer.
He invited parishioners to talk about the groups within our parish.

Reports from Parish Groups

Valerie Skottowe talked about the **Interfaith Group**. Its purpose is to allow different faith groups to learn about each other through monthly meetings hosted by a speaker from a particular faith. The next meeting will be on 14th November at 7.30pm at the Focolare Centre. The theme will be "Winter Festivals" with traditional food from different faith groups.

Joy Burrows-Gee spoke about the last **Filipino Mass** which was held in June with a party afterwards in the Trinity Hall. The Mass was celebrated partly in the Filipino language, Tagalog. The next annual Filipino Mass will be on 14th June 2025 at 6pm with a party to follow.

The **Children's Liturgy Group** was described by Eddie Galucci. It takes place during the 11.30am Sunday Mass at Our Lady's. It is run by a catechist and helpers who engage with children from Reception to year 7. The format includes a "sorry prayer" and a simple explanation of the gospel of the day.

There are three "prayer bears" which are teddy bears that get passed between families and they are a way to encourage children to pray during the week. There is an opportunity to leave a message in the accompanying diary from the last child to the next one to look after the bear for the coming week.

Eddie also helps with **streaming of the Masses** via our YouTube channel, either live on Sunday morning or pre-recorded from the Saturday Mass, also the First Friday Mass from St. Bonaventure. People tune in from around the world, in addition to local parishioners. We also have a Facebook page, Welwyn Garden City Catholic Churches with 1018 YT subscribers and 546 FB followers.

Liz Taite talked about the **Focolare Centre for Unity**. It hosts many events throughout the year, both faith based and serving the local community e.g. NHS meeting and those of the local Police. Their next event will be Carols in the Cloisters on 13th December 7-9pm followed by refreshments, and everyone is invited.

Janet Lewis explained what the **St Vincent de Paul** group do within the parish. They strive to put their faith into action by helping the lonely and housebound people in the community. Many have mental health issues or problems with addiction, or money worries. They provide a chat and opportunity to connect with other agencies who can help. They run the annual Mass for the Sick, give a present at Christmas to lonely people or vouchers for food when needed. Janet thanked everyone who gave money to their cause, and would welcome new volunteers to join them.

Emma Moore represented the local **HCPT group** 183 who take children with special needs to Lourdes during the Easter week. They arrange fund raising activities throughout the year such as quiz nights to help fund the trips. Volunteers to help going to Lourdes are also needed. The children and their families get tremendous joy from the experience.

Sylvie Nichols talked about the **Catholic Women's League** (CWL) which is a group of women who meet regularly socially and to organise fund raising for worthy causes. They meet every Thursday 10.30-12.00 and after the Tuesday evening Mass once a month. Last year they raised £500 for charities such as PACT, CAFOD, and Ukraine relief. Their annual regional Mass will be at Our Lady's on 9th November at 11am.

Obi Ezeuko reminded us about the annual **African Mass**. This is an opportunity to showcase African culture and hospitality, with a splendid display of colourful African dress, dance and food at the party afterwards. There is a collection during the Mass, and the money goes to support African charities to help alleviate poverty and HIV suffering. The African community hope to start a youth group in the future. The next Mass will be on 29th June at 11.30 with a party to follow.

Iwona Pniewska spoke about activities within the **Polish community**. She recalled the challenge of making 1000 pierogi for Canon Norbert's 60th party, and reminded us of the annual Polish Mass with a party afterwards. The Mayor attended and everyone enjoyed traditional Polish dancing and food.

There is a recently formed Polish choir who intend to sing once a month at an 11.30 Sunday Mass. There will be a Carol Concert on 4th January after the 6pm Mass, with funds raised on that evening going towards the Polish Saturday School. The next annual Polish Mass will be on 27th September 2025 at 6pm with a party to follow.

Bill Hayes is Chair of the **Finance Committee**, which has legal status under Canonical Law. His job is to keep the parish solvent. From the diocesan statistics of 2 years ago we had 750 parishioners across the 3 churches. The income for last year was £127,700 which is £20,000 lower than pre pandemic.

The average donation per person per week for our peer group is £1.70. We currently receive £1.25. The outstanding loan is £145,000. So, it is proposed to renew the planned giving scheme to start at the beginning of Lent. Many families send money abroad to relatives so it may be difficult to commit to an amount regularly but ideally we need to increase the income by 30%, and donating by standing orders allows for stability so that there is a regular amount monthly. Gift aid increases the sum by 20% too.

Ann Chappell co-ordinates **hospitality** for events across the parish especially at Trinity Hall. She thanked those who help set up, cook and clean up at these events and would welcome more people to volunteer to be a part of the team.

She is one of three **Safeguarding** representatives. If anyone works with vulnerable adults or children they need a DBS check to be carried out. The forms are available online, references are required but help is on hand to complete the paperwork. It is important that people raise awareness if they have any cause for concern with regard to safeguarding.

Marion Constable is involved in the **Special Needs Masses** which are held several times a year with a gathering afterwards, with food, a quiz, a raffle and a chance to spend time together. It is aimed at people with Special Needs, and their families and friends to help them live fully within the Church. The next Special Needs Mass will be on 25th January 2025.

Anne Maclean-Eltham organises the **Transport to Mass** scheme which enables those with transport or mobility issues to attend Mass. She has 6 regular drivers and a few emergency ones who can take someone to Mass occasionally if their regular friend or relative cannot do so. Volunteer drivers need DBS checks, for which the church will pay.

The **Rosary Procession** in October was a great success. This took place following a Saturday 10 O'clock Mass, with 150 people joining in. The weather was fine and it raised awareness within the local community. It is proposed to have another procession next May. A group gather to say **the Rosary** regularly on the first Friday and Saturday of the month at St Bonaventure, around the Mass times. Dates are in the newsletter.

Susan Read manages the bookings at **Trinity Hall**, with a maintenance team led by David Cox who look after maintenance and cleaning after each event. It is an excellent venue for parish parties and private events such as weddings, anniversaries, baptism parties etc. There are regular keep fit, choir and dance classes weekly, and the purchase of new tables, chairs and cutlery allows for up to 100 guests to be accommodated. To hire the hall, go to the parish website and follow the link to check availability.

Valerie Skottowe talked about the **Friends of Welwyn Care Homes**. This group visit people in care homes once or twice a month on a regular basis. They sit, chat and build a relationship with the resident, who appreciates the company and may not get many other visitors.

The **CAFOD** group raises funds for people in need around the world. In 2023 they raised locally £2025.48, and this year so far a total of £1268.19.

The current appeal is for Middle Eastern Humanitarian Needs, envelopes are at the back of the church or donations can be made online. Bridie Nash thanks our parish community for their support and generosity.

Fr Marco is planning to lead a **pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi** next year, The Jubilee Year. It will be for 5 days. Accommodation, meals and transport costs amount to 700 euros, £600 with a £100 single supplement if desired. The flights and airport transfers will be an additional cost. 50 places have been arranged.

The **Christian churches of WGC** have planned a trip to Winchester on 7th June 2025, the vigil of Pentecost. The trip includes coach service, a tour, a picnic, Evensong, and then return journey to WGC.

Canon Norbert reminds us that we have a new lectionary which will be used from the first Sunday in Advent, with new Mass books too.

He hopes to have time next year to offer an opportunity for Mass readers to come together to talk about the quality of the ministry, and for Eucharistic ministers to renew their commitment. He needs people to take Holy Communion to the housebound, (DBS required), and wants time to spend with the Catechists too.

Fr Marco would like to start a Post Confirmation Youth Group, for people aged 14-18, and possibly for over 18s if there is sufficient interest and volunteers to help organise it. Anyone interested should email Fr Marco.

Next year is the Jubilee Year which begins on 29th December. The Cardinal has appointed Our Lady's Church to be the focal point for the whole of Hertfordshire, i.e. the 4 deaneries: Stevenage, Lea Valley, Watford and St. Albans.

On 6th July 2025 the Cardinal will come to Our Lady's at 4pm to give Catechesis, to 'Pilgrims of Hope' and then celebrate Mass afterwards. We need to plan hospitality for our visitors after that Mass.

The Cardinal will open the Holy Year on 29th December, Bishop Paul will say 6pm Mass on Saturday 4th January and on Sunday 5th January (Epiphany) after which Canon Norbert has proposed that we have a shared lunch in Trinity Hall.

Looking to the Future

Fr Norbert wants life in our community to continue in a positive way, but acknowledges that there may only be one priest to cover our parish in the future. With this in mind he proposes to change the Sunday Mass times to give more flexibility so that a second priest (if available) can help in other parts of the deanery.

He proposes Saturday and Sunday evening Masses to remain as they are, 6pm

Sunday morning: 9am St Bonaventure, 10.30am Holy Family, 12.00 Our Lady's.

This is something for the future, perhaps to start next summer.

Mass times for Christmas Eve will be 5pm OL, 6pm St B, 8pm HF and 9pm OL.

These times allow all three churches time to prepare for the next day, Christmas Day.

During Fr Norbert's absence between 12th November and 9th December, Canon Colin Davies will reside at Our Lady's with Monsignor Harry Turner helping for various Masses and, of course, Fr Marco having overall responsibility.

Fr Norbert gave special thanks to Jacqui Boon, parish administrator for keeping up with all the changing regulations required by the Westminster Diocese.

The meeting ended at 9pm with a prayer from Fr Norbert and a blessing by Fr Marco.