

WELWYN GARDEN CITY CHURCHES

POSSIBLE MERGER OF THREE PARISHES INTO ONE PARISH WITH THREE CHURCHES



St. Bonaventure's Church was built in 1926



Our Lady's was built in 1959



Holy Family was built in 1967

BACKGROUND TO POSSIBLE MERGER

When Fr. Norbert was appointed Parish Priest back in 2008, he was asked by the then Auxiliary Bishop, George Stack, to create one Catholic Community with three churches. He said there was no blueprint and that a way would have to be found to make it effective. In the early years Sunday Mass times were looked at and the schedule of daily Mass altered; we have worked with the present schedule for at least 10 years. During the time of pandemic things had to be different but we are now back to the Mass times as they were. There is one newsletter, one parish website, the preparation for the Sacraments happens together. The united Catholic presence in Welwyn Garden City and beyond is strong and we play an important part in the Ecumenical, Interfaith and Civic life of the area. For many newcomers to our parishes, the facility of having three churches with a variety of Mass times has come quite naturally though the language of three 'parishes' probably seems strange when quite a number of people attend all three.

Bishop Stack asked for there to be one Parish Pastoral Council to reflect all three and this has evolved over the years. Unfortunately during the time of pandemic there were no meetings. Each parish has its own bank account and according to Canon (Church) Law there must be a Finance Committee to assist the Parish Priest and to take on the huge responsibilities which satisfy Charity Law, Insurance requirements, Health and Safety and also Safeguarding. More recently, the three Safeguarding Representatives have agreed to work as a team to serve our parishes. Bishop Stack was asked to facilitate a merger of the parishes many years ago but he did not feel ready for this to take place and so it was put on hold. A few years back the Cardinal wanted the new Hall to be built before he would consider a merger. Now he has asked that 'a formal consultation process begin to inform the possible merging of the three parishes into one new parish whilst continuing to retain all three churches for worship.' In effect this would be a sealing of what was begun many years ago.

Monsignor John Conneely from the Diocese has been asked to put to Fr. Nor-

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Deanery, especially parish priests of neighbouring parishes. *A note of the opinion of the deanery clergy could be taken from the deanery minutes and kept on file. This could be raised at the next deanery meeting.*

Schools may need to be consulted if catchment areas would be affected by the merger. *These would be Our Lady School and Holy Family School*

Religious communities situated in the parish which may be affected by the merger. *This would be the Focolare Community*

A most important group to be consulted will be the people of the parishes. Parishioners should be asked for their written comments.

*Fr. Norbert asks all parish groups to reflect on the possible merger. Individuals too are asked to think about the positive things they already experience with three-as-one, the questions they have about merger, and any other comments. The Diocese is asking for at least 50 responses to show the transparency of this process. It is crucial that ALL opinions are expressed and that everyone feels they have been given a chance to contribute to the discussions. It would be very helpful if the responses come back by the end of August. Helga Mangion, one of our parishioners, has kindly offered to collate all the responses and have them ready for an **Open Parish Meeting at 8pm on Wednesday 28th September** (probably in the New Trinity Hall). The final document would be amended to reflect the feelings of this meeting and then the submission made to the Cardinal who ultimately decides. His decision, according to Canon Law, must be ratified by the Council of Priests which will meet on 9th November, 2022.*

Please send written thoughts to Fr. Norbert at 141 Woodhall Lane, Welwyn Garden City AL7 3TP and/or email norbertfernandes@rcdow.org.uk These will be passed on to Helga to be collated.

Monsignor Conneely has been pointed out that:

The three parishes are effectively working as one, but a merger would ease the administration burden on the Parish Priest and the parishioners.

The unity and benefit from this cooperation is seen in the parish hall, and other parish activities so the parishes would benefit spiritually and pastorally as well as economically.

All three church buildings will be used. A possible name for the new parish

PRAYER FOR OUR PARISH COMMUNITY

All praise and glory are yours, loving Father,
maker and ruler of the universe:

We praise you for calling us to be your people,
your beloved daughters and sons.

Guide our community as we try to follow Jesus.

Fill us with love for those in need of our help
and open our hearts to all.

Let your Spirit teach us to serve in love
and to praise you by our work and worship.

Father of all, we praise you
through Jesus Christ our Lord and Brother,
in the love of your Holy Spirit
now and for ever. Amen.