

THE THREE PARISHES MAGAZINE



NEWS & VIEWS OF THE STEVENAGE ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISHES OF:
THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD, ST JOSEPH'S AND ST HILDA'S



This Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help hangs in the side chapel of St Hilda's Church and was painted by the late Michael Delany, who was a parishioner of St Hilda's. It is a copy of the original which hangs in the Church of St. Alphonsus in Rome. (See article on Icons and Iconography inside).

***We wish all our readers
a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year!***

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From the Editorial and Production Group

Welcome to our last edition of the 'Three Parishes Magazine' for 2014. This magazine represents the three parishes across Stevenage and we are always looking for help with articles and ideas, we especially would like volunteers to join our small team to help produce the magazine, you can be involved for as little as a couple of hours month, or any time you can offer. So please do get in touch as this magazine can only continue with increased involvement from some of our 1600 parishioners. We hope you enjoy the magazine and are very thankful for all those parishioners that submitted articles, and of course to Fr Michael, Fr Vincent and Fr Auson for their continuing support and encouragement.

Since writing this edition we have all been the news that Fr Auson will be leaving us in January. We would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his service and wish him success and happiness in his new parish.

Three Parishes Growing In Faith

Fr Michael



Welcome to the Parish Magazine which helps us to share the good things happening across the three Stevenage Parishes. In this edition we focus on St Hilda's, the newest of the three Parishes although now over 50 years old. St Hilda's along with Transfiguration and St Joseph's has been part of the Growing in Faith Campaign run by our Diocese in the last year. Many thanks to all those who are part of that fundraising for the Diocese and for the Parishes.

At St Hilda's the income from this Campaign over the next 5 years will help to fund the rebuilding of the collapsing long retaining wall along Hydean Way. This work has been completed. The rebuilding of the flight of steps at the front of St Hilda's, due to take place in February, will also be helped by Growing in Faith contributions.

At Transfiguration the Growing in Faith contributions will fund internal refurbishment of the Church including gradual replacement of chairs as they wear out and eventually replacing the boiler for the Church heating.

At St Joseph's the plan to enlarge the Church and build a Parish Hall to accommodate the Parish's large numbers will be greatly helped by those donating to Growing in Faith. At present the Diocesan Building Department and Surveyors Office are working hard on the costing of the project and we keenly await their report.

Stevenage in its three Parishes is a vibrant Catholic community. These building and maintenance plans are the background of what is important - the strong spiritual life of its Priests and people. We pray that the Lord is with us in all that we do because "if the Lord does not do the work in vain do the builders labour".

Fr Michael SDS
Parish Priest

"Human rights are not only violated by terrorism, repression or assassination but also by unfair economic structure that create huge inequalities." **Pope Francis**



Nine months before I was asked to come to Stevenage as Parish Priest I was on my annual Retreat. This was a special retreat, centred on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne in Northern England, along with Archbishop Vincent Nichols, Bishop John Arnold (now moving from our Diocese to be the new Bishop of Salford) and other fellow Priests. I was walking in the footsteps of “the northern saints”. We were being reminded that in the dark and turbulent times after the end of the Roman occupation, during the Anglo-Saxon colonisation, the light of heaven had shone through the work and witness of the northern monastic communities, which were often called “villages of God”. In the steps we took our retreat master recalled the courageous lives of St Columba at Iona, St Aiden and St Cuthbert at Lindisfarne, St Wilfred and St Bede and one of the most remarkable figures of that time, St Hilda of Whitby.

Hilda was born the grandniece of King Edwin of Northumbria in 614; her childhood was turbulent and included the violent death of her warring father. She would have been at the edge of the retinue of King Edwin when he and all his followers were baptised by St Paulinus before establishing a great Christian centre at York.

It was not political power but the power of religious life on community which attracted Hilda. She became a nun at 33 and founded a double monastery of Monks and Nuns at Whitby. She grew to be the most powerful and inspirational leader of her time. She told her community “trade with the gifts God has given you”. She spoke strongly about standing up for the faith: “being buffeted by trials learn to laugh. Being criticised for your beliefs, give thanks. Having failed, determine to succeed”. She loved and promoted music and hymns, saying that “singing gives courage to the soul”.

Such was the force of her vision and the fame of her religious community that her Abbey was chosen to host a great Synod of the Church, over which, as abbess, Hilda presided. The Synod of Whitby was one of

the great events of British history. It united the Celtic and Roman tradition in a lasting unity and settled many issues for the worldwide Church including the method of determining the date of Easter which is still in use today. Declared a Saint shortly after her death in 680, her Feast Day is November 17th. Fourteen hundred years after her death, she remains a powerful example of wisdom, religious leadership and conciliation: an appropriate Saint on whom today to direct our prayers for the Extraordinary Synod on Family Life led by Pope Francis in Rome.

My walking retreat in 2012 at which I learnt a lot about St Hilda was during a nine month spiritual sabbatical after being a Parish Priest in London for 24 years. Little did I know then that towards the end of this sabbatical I would be sitting in Archbishops House in Westminster being asked by the Bishop to go to a Parish dedicated to St Hilda. I was very happy. A few months earlier I would have known almost nothing of St Hilda now I knew a lot: such are the mysterious ways of the Lord! And as a member of a modern Religious Community, the Salvatorians, I am very happy to be living in Stevenage under the auspices of “the Mother of Religious Life in England.”

The Role of a Parish Pastoral Council

Jacky Swanson

The role of a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is to enrich the quality of parish life and provide opportunities for parishioners to grow in their relationship with God and with each other. In order to do this, a PPC needs work alongside the parish priest to understand and support the existing good work that is happening in the Parish as well as look for and respond to the pastoral needs and concerns of the parish.

The Pastoral Council is a consultative body, aimed at developing policy and programmes of pastoral activity, with a view to setting long-term goals and priorities and sustaining the spiritual growth of the community. It isn't just the lack of available priests that creates a need for increasing involvement of lay people in such roles, but growing recognition that lay people are not called to simply help their priests run their parishes, but to share fully in the responsibility for the existence and action of the church.

We certainly need and value those who generously give of their gifts and talents, looking after the important and regular practical needs, but we also need to consider how we grow our faith and how we can effectively transform our society and ourselves.

Fr Auson: Priest at Transfiguration



Fr Auson was born in 1972 in the remote village of Karonge in North-West Tanzania on the shores of Lake Victoria – an area rich in wildlife including Lion, Leopard and Hippo! He was the second child of devout Catholic parents who eventually raised a family of 8 children - 5 girls and 3 boys. While his mother remained at home, Fr Auson's father, who was a mechanic in the Tanzanian army, spent much time away servicing Chinese aircraft at a base in South Tanzania. Life at home was happy but very simple.

Primary education began at the age of six and was initially at the village school where Swahili was the main language. English was taught in the third year. At the age of 11, it was secondary school and then, at the age of 16, Fr Auson entered the Diocesan Preparatory Seminary in Rutabo for two years training. He succeeded in passing all his exams!

Then, he joined the Diocesan Junior Seminary in Rubya for 4 years. While initially intending to progress to the Diocesan Seminary, Fr Auson decided instead to enter the Salvatorian Formation House in Tunduru - Masasi. After advanced studies, he obtained a BA in Philosophy in 2003, followed by BA in Theology in 2006.

Following his Ordination in May 2007, Fr Auson was appointed as a curate in Dar es Salaam but was soon promoted to Novice Master for 3 years in the Salvatorian Formation House in Tunduru. Then, in June 2011, after a brief period as Parish Priest in Mandera Parish, Morogoro, Fr Auson was asked to go to the UK where he served successively as a curate in Thornbury, Harrow Weald and Plumstead parishes.

In January 2014, Fr Auson was appointed to be resident priest at the Transfiguration and he has settled happily here. He is also continuing his studies at St Mary's University, London and was this year awarded an MA in Catholic Education. He is now studying for a PhD in Catholic Education which he hopes to complete in 2018.

Both his parents are now deceased, but he keeps in contact with his sisters, all now married, and his two brothers who are both in the Tanzanian army. As to his interests here, Fr Auson is keen on jogging and reading and, like Fr Vincent in Bedwell; he is a keen Chelsea fan! He considers he would do well playing at No 11 and is awaiting an invitation from Jose Mourinho to be Chaplain of the Club! Fr Auson is a proud Tanzanian, and

especially proud of two of his fellow countrymen: - firstly, the late Julius Nyerere, the country's first President, known as the 'Father of the Nation' and a devout Catholic. Nyerere has recently been nominated by the Vatican for the process of Beatification. The other is Cardinal Rugambwa (1912-1997) who, in 1960, became the very first native African to be elected a Cardinal.

As to the future of his country, Fr Auson is very concerned about the rising growth of Islam in some parts of Tanzania, and also about the strong influence of Evangelical Christian sects in some areas. We in Stevenage express our profound gratitude to Tanzania for 'loaning' us such a good priest and we pray that country will have a peaceful and prosperous future.

The Book of Jonah: *Misunderstanding God's Love* Sister Alphonus OP

The book of Jonah is one of the very short books of the Bible. It takes up 2 pages and has 4 chapters. The story begins with an act of disobedience and finishes with an act of obedience but with no change of heart.

Was there really a whale or big fish? Scholars can't agree. We can decide for ourselves

Jonah was asked by God to go to preach a message of impending punishment to the people of Niniveh. To reach this city, it is necessary to travel east. But not liking this commission, Jonah travels west taking a ship believing he can escape God's power. But God has universal power on sea and land. He causes a great storm, thunder, lightning and huge waves which threaten the ship. The ship's crew are terrified. They throw cargo overboard and encourage each other to pray to their various gods. But when nothing happens they look for Jonah who is fast asleep. They waken him and ask him to pray to his God. But Jonah realises this would be futile because he is disobeying God and trying to get away from Him. Since the storm is getting worse, the crew think someone is to blame. Following custom, they draw lots and, not surprisingly, the lot falls on Jonah. Jonah confesses that he is to blame and asks the sailors to throw him into the sea, which they do.

One of the lessons that Jonah needs to learn is that God is a God of love even when disobeyed. So as Jonah flounders in the sea he is swallowed by a 'large fish'. Immediately, the storm subsides. Jonah remains in the 'fish' for three days and nights. It was a good opportunity to pray and Jonah did. You can read his prayer in Jonah Ch 2. Now he knows

he can't run away from God. His prayer finished, the fish has had enough and delivers Jonah to dry land.

But God hasn't finished with Jonah. For a second time, He gives his command "Go to Nineveh the great city and announce to them the message I give you. This time, Jonah obeys. He goes to Ninevah and begins to preach the message "Forty days more and the city will be destroyed". He's a good preacher and the people believe him. They do penance, and the whole city from the King to the least of his subjects repent of their sins and turn from their evil ways. God has compassion and does not carry out the threatened punishment. Christians would expect nothing else. We know God saves his people. But Jonah is very displeased and he tells God. (To understand just how angry he is, read the beginning of Chapter 4). So angry is he that God is compassionate that he wants his life to end. God, however, asks him "What *right* have you to be angry?" Jonah builds himself a hut for shade. A fine tree springs up beside his hut but more disappointment follows. Next morning, the tree withers and dies and he is open to the very great heat of the sun and an intensely hot wind. Once again he wants to die. God comes to him again, asking why he is angry. He had given it no care. It was not his. God leaves Jonah with the question 'What about Niveveh and its people? Among them are 120,000 totally innocent people. Should I not be concerned for such a great city? "

St Hilda's Boy to represent Britain

A 15 year old Parishioner of St Hilda's, student of the John Henry Newman School and ex-pupil of St Margaret Clitherow School, Daniel Streeter, has been selected to represent the Catholic Schools of Great Britain, running the 800m in the Annual FISEC games to be held in Malta next July 2015. Daniel will be one of a 16 strong squad who will take part in the Athletics arena and compete against 14 other countries. There will be an impressive opening and closing ceremony – similar to that of the Olympics. Daniel, who worships with his family at S Hilda's and made his Confirmation there last year, is a very determined athlete and we all wish him well in his training and success representing his country.

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A sandwich walks into a bar, the landlord says "Sorry we don't serve food!"

A Sonnet what Christmas Means to Me

Kathy Dickenson

A time to reflect & see,
To welcome the heavenly mystery
The virgin gives birth to the Holy Child
Came down on earth to save you and me:
In a manger, with beasts to warm Him with their breath:
In common stance they took their place –
The shepherds came with gifts in their hands,
While moving quietly through the lands
The Magi came at a stars command –
And bowed love to Him so meek & mild;
The Christmas spirit comes to refresh my mind
Open my heart to the Holy Child
A sinking sun dispels the light
And I pray that man, dispels the night!



50th Wedding Anniversary

Mary and Fred Ellis

At the beginning the year 2014 we were invited by the Diocese of Westminster to apply to attend mass at Westminster Cathedral with the Cardinal to celebrate our special wedding anniversary. This we did and in due course our invitation arrived to attend a mass of Thanksgiving for Matrimony on 7th June 2014 at 3.00pm, 620 couples arrived to fill the Cathedral from all over the diocese, we felt so special being there at such a wonderful service.

We wanted to celebrate with our own mass at St Joseph's Church in Bedwell because we were married there on Saturday 5th September 1964. Some of our family and friends were able to join us for mass, where we renew our vows (surprise to us) and had a meaningful, family mass with breakfast in the Church hall afterwards. We felt blessed and proud to have achieved 50 years of married life together.

We decided to go away for the weekend, to Butlins in Minehead, Somerset where we went for our honeymoon, only this time we took our children, grandchildren and some family and friends (15 of us in all) there was lots of fun and laughter and we created some very happy memories to last us for many years to come. Life and time is precious and we felt the love and care all around us. We have our health; God has been good to us. Long may it last.

I started collecting Icons many years ago when my sister presented me with one after a summer holiday to Crete. Today I have nearly thirty. I don't consider myself anything of an expert; I just enjoy the art form, but when it was suggested I write a short article I quickly agreed.

The Icon, from the Greek "eikon" meaning image, is one of the earliest forms of Christian art, dating from the early days of the Church when free standing figures or statues were not popular due to their association with pagan religions. They were once common in all Christian traditions although today they are more closely associated with the Eastern Orthodox, Coptic and certain eastern Catholic Churches.

The earliest surviving panel icons are to be found at the famous Greek Orthodox monastery of St Catherine in the Sinai desert. Very few other early Icons survive due to the so-called Iconoclast period in the Byzantine Empire when images were banned from 726AD by the Emperor Leo the third quoting the commandment "Thou shall not make graven image nor any likeness of any divine thing". The production and worship was eventually restored after it was argued that since Christ is God become human, and assumed human form, God could be depicted in images.

In the Orthodox Churches Icons are not seen as art in the general sense, but as a method of prayer. They are taken on pilgrimage and historically even into battle. Their purpose is to sanctify daily life and are an integral part of what the Russian Orthodox call "bytovoe blagochestie" or "art of sacred living" In the Eastern tradition pictures are very formulaic with little room for artistic license and symbology is everywhere. Christ, the saints and angels always have halos. Figures have consistent facial appearances and often identical poses. Colour is stylised. Jesus always wears a red undergarment and blue outer, with Mary wearing the colours in reverse. Red is the colour of divine life, blue human life and white the light of God. We in the west have taken more licence, and there is far less consistency, as our pictures have developed more as an art form than just a focus for worship. In Stevenage we have several notable icons. The Cathedral of St George at the Coptic Orthodox Church Centre at Shepalbury Manor is well worth a visit. In the side chapel of our own St Hilda's church there is a modern copy of the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the fourteenth century Cretan original being in the Church of St Alphonsus on the Esquiline Hill in Rome. Having seen both the St Hilda's version it is a remarkably accurate rendition.

It has been nearly fifty years since I came to England from Italy; I arrived in Stevenage in the mid 1960's, and have seen many changes in the parish during that time.

Having come from a strong Catholic background, I went to mass every week and was happy to be introduced to the Transfiguration of our Lord Church. Although the mass was in English, the service was in the same order as at home, and as I knew it by heart, I was able to follow it and pick up English at the same time.

The priest at the time was Father Straub who was very welcoming and kind. He was always around if you needed to talk, and would regularly visit the parishioners at home. Up until the 1980s, the church was always kept open during the day so you could pop in anytime if you wanted to say a prayer or light a candle. This was all very similar to Italy, which was great.

There were of course several differences, with Italy being a Catholic country; I was used to having many large old Catholic churches everywhere which I could visit any time. In the town I come from, there were and still are many religious festivals celebrated throughout the year, such as Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and All Souls Day; where the entire town comes together and celebrates with parades and processions.

Other cultural differences include the language, food, climate, education, and family life. In Italy we lived outdoors more due to the hot weather, within a large community where everyone knew each other.

However we soon settled in well in Stevenage, worked hard for many years, built up a business, and made many friends. We taught our children to speak Italian and about Italian traditions, whilst we in turn learnt to speak English and about English traditions. We found the two cultures complimented each other well.

Coming to England has been very rewarding with regards to work and our children obtaining a good education. My strong Catholic faith has always been a great comfort to me. Having been through some very difficult times in my life, I truly believe God has always helped me and will continue to do so.

.....
Wife to husband; You certainly made a fool of yourself tonight. I just hope nobody realised you were sober!!

"Is there no one left in Britain who can make a sandwich?" screamed a recent 'Daily Mail' headline above a story about recruitment of Hungarians rather than British workers to make sandwiches in Northampton. "Once again foreigners are robbing us of our jobs." When the dust had settled it appeared that 'Greencore,' Britain's largest sandwich maker which supplies Waitrose and Marks and Spencer among others, had recruited about 12 of 300+ new jobs in Hungary. Workers are paid the national minimum of £6.50 for 12 hour shift in cold and sometimes frozen, conditions qualifying for a 'cold payment' of 24p an hour after 3 months probation. Perhaps low pay is at the root of some recruitment problems. As the Financial Times reported in September last year: 'Britain's labour market has behaved in ways that no one expected since the crisis.....employment has risen higher than the previous peak yet wage growth has remained extremely weak.'

According to Prof Paul Gregg of Bath University, a leading labour market expert 'the protracted squeeze on pay packets since the financial crisis means the average worker in Britain is already £5,000 a year worse off than in 2008.' (Guardian 24/10/14).

This is what has stimulated the struggle for the 'living wage'. This began with a campaign by cleaners in Canary Wharf to shame the wealth executives who employed them to pay better wages, and has rapidly spread from its East London roots. Catholic community groups have been at the forefront of this movement, unsurprisingly given that it is such an obvious expression of "the preferential option for the poor" which is at the root of modern Catholic social thought and action.

Where the Living Wage has been adopted it has not had the dire consequences its critics predicted. The business consultant KPMG adopted it they noted that the extra wage cost are more than offset by 'greater loyalty and higher morale leading to better performance.'

As Pope Francis has noted, without "attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems," It is worth remembering that the origins of modern Catholic on the Just Wage sprang from the struggle for the 'Dockers Tanner' by London dock workers in the late 19th century. Without that militant trade union action it is hard to see how Cardinal Manning could have persuaded Pope Leo to place Social Justice at the forefront of Catholic teaching.

James Lucas, born in 1813, gained international notoriety as *The Hermit of Redcoats*. His father, a partner in a Liverpool firm that owned sugar plantations in the West Indies, bought Elmwood House at Redcoats Green, Little Wymondley as the family home about 1820. From birth James had a decidedly eccentric nature and was thought crazy by almost everyone apart from his mother. He ran away from several schools but was said to have an '*acute intellect*' and '*... shrewd enough to know a hawk from a hacksaw...*'

When his father died in 1830, James lived the life of a country gentleman, although frequently upsetting local society. For example, he annoyed the local hunt when he joined them wearing eccentric clothes and often riding barefoot. When his mother died in 1849 James was heartbroken and sat by her coffin for 16 weeks before allowing her to be buried. He spent the rest of his life living alone in the kitchen at Elmwood House, only speaking to visitors through an iron grille. He let the rest of the house fall into dilapidation.

James slept on a bed of ash and went about naked apart from wrapping himself in a blanket. He never washed, cut his fingernails, toenails or hair, and his face became so black from soot that only the whites of his eyes showed. He lived on milk, bread, cheese, eggs, red herrings and gin, and avoided cooked food for fear it was poisoned. The house became infested with rats and mice, and James was forced to keep his food in a basket hanging from the ceiling. He dismissed the servants but employed two armed watchmen for personal protection, and always kept a blunderbuss at his side to drive away unwanted visitors.

He refused to sign documents bearing the Queen's stamp (i.e. the head of Queen Victoria) as he considered she was not the rightful heir to the throne. In 1850 when he publicly claimed he favoured the Catholic religion and the Pope, it so upset local hotheads that they attacked the house and smashed what few windows remained. This only increased his notoriety and the number of visiting sightseers, often 200 a day. Charles Dickens, who once visited James, cast him as Mr Mopes in his book *Tom Tiddler's Ground*.

Whilst James preferred to talk to tramps and children, he was also happy to converse with well-to-do folk. He often gave visitors a small gift, but for tramps the gift depended on their religious denomination. A Church of England beggar received a penny and half a glass of gin, a nonconformist

twopence but no gin, and a Catholic, who could recite the Lords Prayer in Latin, received three pennies and a full glass of gin.

Following his death in 1874, seventeen cartloads of soot, ash and rubbish were removed from the house, after being carefully searched for cash. Although Elmwood House no longer exists, the legend of James Lucas, *The Hermit of Redcoats* lives on.

Alone at Christmas

For most of us, Christmas Day will be a time spent with family or friends and sharing in a traditional meal together. But the sad reality is that many people in Stevenage will eat alone this Christmas Day. They might feel that nobody really cares for them or even thinks about them.

But some do care about them and want to do something to help! On Christmas Day this year, some 40 people in Stevenage, who would otherwise be alone, have been invited as guests to a Christmas Dinner at the Symonds Green Community Hall. They will be served a full traditional meal in a warm festive setting, with crackers, hats, games, music, a gift and good company. This event has been organised now for the last four years by the local Conference of the Society of Vincent de Paul (SVP). The funding comes from generous supporters. Volunteers cook and serve the meal, and they wash up too! The Community Centre makes no charge for the use of the hall. If needed, guests are taken there and seen back home safely. It is an inspiring occasion. One elderly lady who came to the Christmas Dinner expressed her thanks for a really enjoyable time and said *"this is the first time for seventeen years that I have not been alone on Christmas Day"* That really says it all

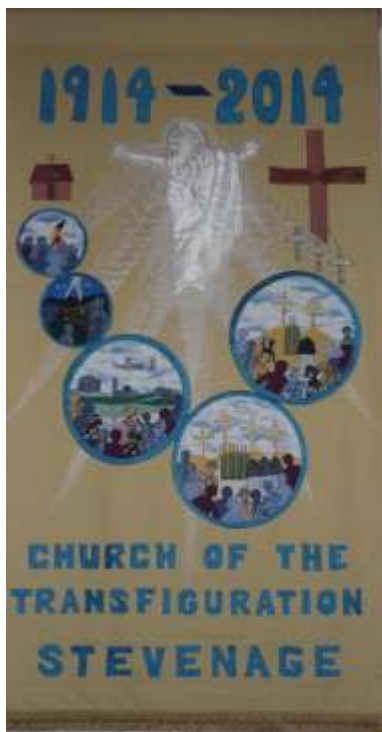
Transfiguration's Centenary and Val's Banner!

Transfiguration celebrated its Centenary year in 2014 with various special events including; a Commemorative mass on 14th January - the actual anniversary date, a Parish Pilgrimage to Walsingham on the Feast of the Transfiguration, a Celebration 'Parish Sunday Lunch' at the Novotel Hotel, a Children's party and an Advent Day of Recollection. But the main event was undoubtedly the Centenary Mass on 14 September celebrated by Bishop John Sherrington and con-celebrated by 6 other priests. Guests included Stevenage MP, Stephen McPartland, The Mayor of Stevenage Cllr Sherma Batson, Sr Loretta Dooley OP, and representatives of several

other Stevenage churches and organisations. Another special guest was Mrs Jean Austin, representing the firm of Austin's, who built the church in 1913 and who have served the parish so well in many other ways over the years.

So we are left with many good memories of 2014. But the Parish has also has been left with some more tangible and permanent artefacts to mark its 100 years existence, including a Papal Blessing, a continuous Novena of Prayer from the Walsingham Association and a special Anniversary Prayer Card composed by our priest, Fr Auson.

But there is also one outstanding new feature which is now displayed permanently on a wall at Transfiguration. It's our hand-crafted Centenary Banner designed and made by local artist and parishioner Val Aylin. The photograph here does not do justice to the actual banner. It needs to be seen to be appreciated in its full size and colour. But the main features can be made out;



- the central figure representing the Transfiguration of Our Lord on the Mountain – to which the church is dedicated
- five circular panels ‘roundels’ flowing round the figure of Our Lord
- Each roundel represents a period (era) of the parish history and details its main events, including:
 - The arrival of Belgian refugees in 1914 and the flying of the Belgian Flag at the end of the war:
 - The inter-war years:
 - The 1939-45 war and fund raising for the war effort:
 - The post-war building of the New Town and construction of St Joseph’s and St Hildas:
 - The Formation of the Team Ministry and the opening of Christ the King:

Finally, but with no ‘roundel’, the present period: - closer integration of three parishes under one Parish Priest.

Let us all remember this: one cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one's life. Pope Francis

Transfiguration - and its congregation of Belgian refugees in 1914!

The first edition of this magazine described the opening of the Transfiguration church in **January 1914**. The number of Catholics in Stevenage was small and there was no resident priest. Then in July 1914, WW1 began. Belgium was invaded and many refugees came to the UK from Flanders. Some were billeted in Stevenage and most were Catholics. As a result, the congregation at Transfiguration increased notably.



An 'iconic' photograph of the congregation in August 1914

In 1960 a letter was sent to Fr Straub (then Parish Priest at Transfiguration) from a M. Van Raebroekx living in Ranst, Belgium. Here are some extracts:-

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am a Belgian who lived for 6 months in Knebworth in 1914-15. My father and mother died there both being buried in Knebworth. We used to go to mass in Stevenage. Fr Barton from Baldock was the priest. Enclosed please find a photograph showing all the people that went to the church in August 1914. It shows Fr Barton on the left. The lady at the extreme right swept the church and she lived next-door to the church. She was not a Catholic. The Clark family from Stevenage is next to her and their youngest daughter is at the gate. At least nine of the people shown are Belgians who lived in Stevenage”

A century of growth at Transfiguration!

Mass attendance 1914: about 17

Mass attendance 2014: about 460

The Miracle that is my Grandson

Kathy Martins

We were all thrilled when my daughter became pregnant, and it was wonderful to see her so well and happy during her pregnancy. But nothing prepared us (or her!) for the totally unexpected very early birth of her son at only 28 weeks – scarily 3 months before the due date! Had that happened when my daughter had been born, the most likely outcome would be that she would not survive. Our hearts were in our mouths, and lots of urgent praying took place as we absorbed the shock of seeing the minute little soul weighing 11b 12ozs lying in the middle of what seemed a vast incubator.

Fortunately, the incubator was in the superb Neonatal Department at the Lister Hospital, this department has wonderful modern equipment and a totally dedicated and wonderfully skilful staff. From a helpless little creature, a beautifully formed little baby emerged, gradually growing in size and awareness. Who would have imagined that a baby that was not due to be born for three months would emerge with a full head of hair? Who would guess that if an adult little finger touched his tiny little palm he would close his tiny fingers round it and squeeze quite hard?

My daughter claims that the only thing that enabled her to walk away each evening from her new born baby was the certain knowledge that he would be cared for overnight by nurses who were as dedicated to his welfare as his own mother and father. What a testament to the dedication of the staff!

One of the elements of the care of these tiny was “kangaroo care” – the babies would be laid down skin to skin on the chests of their Mums and Dads to compensate for the lack of contact in their lives in incubators. We look with such gratitude and hope at our grandson, and know that the professionalism and dedication of so many people are to thank for his survival. These range from the medical staff at all levels to the team of volunteers who knit little hats and blankets for these tiny babies. The ones given to him are now treasured souvenirs!

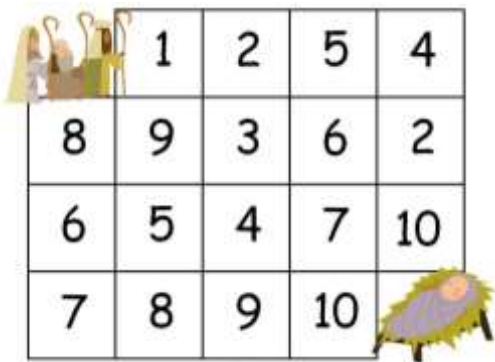
As a grateful grandmother, I would like to pay tribute and thank everyone concerned in his progress, as well as the bravery of my daughter and other parents of tiny babies who work with the staff and learn to meet the special needs of their little ones. Creation has never seemed more exciting!

Never believe an atom. They make up everything!

Children's Page

Shepherd Maze

Can you get the shepherds to baby Jesus by drawing a path 1-10?



What goes oh, oh, oh?

Santa walking backwards!

What do monkeys sing at Christmas?

Jungle bells, jungle bells! !

Spot the Differences!



What do you say to Father Christmas when he is taking the register?
Present!

What's red and white, red and white, red and white?
Father Christmas rolling down the hill!

COMPETITION!!

We are inviting all children to enter our Christmas Competition. All you need to do is draw or paint a picture of what Christmas means to you. There will be separate age categories; under 7, age 8 to 11 and age 12 to 15. There will be one winner per age category and all winners will receive a £10.00 gift voucher and have their picture displayed! Please give your picture to your Parish Secretary by **5th January 2015**.



This autumn I was privileged to be part of the amazing art installation by Paul Cummins. This artist has created ‘Blood Swept Lands’ to commemorate the anniversary of WW1. Ceramic poppies have been created in a factory in Derby where they are working 23 hours shifts to produce the poppies. Each poppy signifies the loss of a life during WW1. The history books state that 888,246 young men lost their lives - this is just a number, however, when one sees it represented in the form of Poppies,



and to see the amount of space they take in the moat at the Tower of London, the significance of the number who died takes on a completely different meaning. The scale of the art work is breathtaking and the enormity of the loss of life is chilling. I have been part of the band of 8000 volunteers who have been turning up in daily shifts since August to assemble and place the poppies in the moat at the Tower of London. I have been twice and met people from all walks of life and the conversations and reminiscences have been wonderful.

The art work is beautiful and very thought provoking and the poppies are being sold to aid war charities. All ages can appreciate the work at different levels. Every evening at dusk the roll of honour was read out and the last post played. I would suggest you try and get access to a computer to view the images. To get a good impression of the scale of the work, follow the links when the Queen went to visit, some really good photos.

My sister Rosanna volunteered for the dismantling team. This was equally poignant as over the period of dismantling it resembled the Somme everything oozing mud! So overall it was moving in so many ways.

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields*

From Flanders Fields. John McCrae (1872-1918)

Stevenage Parishes Information

St Joseph's

Fr Michael Doherty SDS (Parish Priest)

Fr Vincent Dike (Priest in residence)

Sunday Mass: (Sat, 6pm), 10am, 12noon, 6pm

Weekday Mass: Mon, Thurs, Fri, 9.15am, Wed; 7.00pm

Holyday Mass: 9.15am

Confession: Sat. 10.00am, 5.30pm

Rosary/Benedicn Fri. 6.00pm

St Hilda's

Fr Michael Doherty SDS Parish Priest (Resident)

Sunday Mass: (Sat 6.30pm), 9.30am (sung), 11.00am

Weekday Mass: Mon, Tues, Fri, Sat 9.30am; Thu 8.0pm

Holyday Mass: 9.30am; 8pm

Exposition: Thurs 7-8pm, Fri 10-11am (with Benediction)

Confession: Sat. 10.00am, 6.00pm

Transfiguration

Fr Michael Doherty SDS (Parish Priest)

Fr Auson Kamugisha SDS (Priest in residence)

Sunday Mass; (Sat 6.00pm), 11.00am

Weekday Mass: Tues, Wed, Thurs, Fri 9.30am

Holyday Mass: 9.30am

Confession: Sat. 5.15pm

Contact information

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Transfiguration: 4 Basils Road, SG1 3PX Tel. 01438 226857

Email: stevenageoldtown@rcdow.org.uk

Website: www.parish.rcdow.org.uk/stevenagetransfiguration