

SVP Conference of the Sacred Heart,
Unity Mahaica
Under Guyana National Council.

Our Lady of Lourdes SVP Conference
Milton Keynes, Under Northampton Central
Council.

February 2009.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we have Mark Januszewski and Terry Brown visiting you shortly, we thought it would be a chance too good to miss to let you know what your Twin Conference in Milton Keynes gets up to!

Where better to begin than with our church, Our Lady of Lourdes at Coffee Hall (though some members of our conference come from other churches in the area). You can see it is a very modern church, having been opened and blessed in 1976, and dedicated in February 2001.

It is quite interesting having been built on the lines of the Villa Savoye in Poissy, France, which had been designed by Le Corbusier. Previously le Corbusier had been commissioned by two Dominican priests, Fr. Couturier and Fr. Regamey to design the monastery of La Tourette.

This modern line of plain box type architecture subsequently influenced the building of a number of Catholic churches in Europe.

Enough of where we meet – what do we get up to?

We are quite a small Conference with between 5 to 10 members at any one time, and meet once a month to pray, have reflection from Sr. Kathrine, our Siproital adviser. To discuss the best way to support new and ongoing contacts, how to fund raise etc. Our funds come from donations, and various fundraising activities, some of which you are now about to hear about.

Fundraising is both hard work and fun as it gives us a chance to mix with the wider community, and explain to them the type of support the SVP can give. Activities like the Bike Ride also mean's people join in who are not members of our Conference. We get a good few laughs, make new friends and supporters in consequence.

The first picture shows our 'Giving Tree' – during Advent each year we find a suitable branch, 'plant' it and put it at the back of the Church. The little cards attached all have something written on them, like chocolates, biscuits, tea coffee, soaps etc. People are asked to take one and bring back the item named on it. This means people can spend whatever they can afford – this works really well. Just before Christmas we wrap up the gifts and make up hampers for the needy we have been asked to support, and would not have anything special normally at this time.

Our Lady of Lourdes is not a rich parish, but people are very generous and we have to buy very little just maybe fruit, or items that do not last long to finish the hampers.

Picture two shows another annual event, the bike ride, which covers quite a wide area, and has several 'check and refreshment points', our church being one of them. This raises funds for the SVP and also for some of the older churches, which might otherwise gradually fall down and be lost for ever.

Sometimes the rides are not in as good weather as this one was, and it pours with rain, but whether the bikers finish wet or dry, everyone is tired but still full of laughter (well perhaps the odd tear when someone parts company with their bike! Fortunately it does not happen often, and there are only a few scrapes and bruises to show for these unscheduled stops!)

Milton Keynes has many green and wooded areas, often around lakes, great for walking. There are two such lakes at Willen, the South lake holds water sport events, Water ski-ing, yachting, dragon boat racing. Round the edge there are many distractions (an example of which you can see in a minute). The North Lake is Quieter, and is great for bird watching.

Yes, you have guessed it every year the SVP members get sponsorship and walk round the South Lake. This is always popular (whatever the weather), and raises quite a bit of money.

This year, however, things did not go quite to plan. First Linda and Stuart brought along Jimmy a three legged dog they look after from time to time. (It is amazing how quickly Jimmy can move). The idea was for Megan to join them with another dog Stoney, a border collie borrowed for the walk. However, the link with Stoney did not happen, so by this time the main party had vanished from sight, so undeterred the three, plus Jimmy set off and did a detour round the North Lake.

Finally all linked up having finished both walks, and the three discovered a couple of the members from the main party had been lured off the track onto this 'activity trail'. Yes, the third picture shows Leonie, followed by Irene enjoying the challenge! Told you we do have fun as well as the serious side.

The funds raised from the sponsored events enable us to support families where the bread winner is out of work, or has left home, and they are struggling to make ends meet, someone may have just come out of hospital, or prison, elderly people in sheltered accommodation, or living on their own and have no support. We may find ourselves going to a house, a bungalow, a caravan or a canal boat. Whoever and wherever they are we support them in the best way possible.

We hold a Mass for the sick twice a year, and afterwards give people a light meal, so that they can meet and talk to other people. Particularly for the disabled who rarely get out of their four walls this means a great deal. It makes you realise that some of the people in sheltered accommodation, often have no one visiting them and to be brought to the Mass and be able to meet others after gives them something to look

forward to. There is always a great feeling of peace at these Masses and the feeling that God is with us is very strong. The fourth picture shows some of the people after one Mass held earlier last year. Fr. Andy in the picture left us at the end of August to go on a course in the United States for six months. Fr. Joe Williams is our Parish Priest now.

Outside England, the money raised helps us support other Conferences and recently we were able to fund a youngster with further studies in India, and another Indian student for two years at a teacher training college.

We hope this gives you a taste of some of the things we do. I guess some of yours will be similar, others very different, just as with the needs of those you support.

We would love to hear from you sometime. Meanwhile enjoy the visit from Terry and Mark.

We remember you in our prayers.

With best wishes,

God Bless,

From our President Irene Higgins, Sister Kathrine (a sister with the Holy Family of Bordeaux, and our spiritual adviser), Stuart and Linda, Leonie, Margaret, Ricky and Megan.