

Crawley Deanery News

Connecting Catholic Communities

AUTUMN 2026

THE WORD IS LIFE: News from the New Parish (to be)

Historic Church Celebrates 150th Year

One of Sussex's best kept secrets was celebrated on Saturday 27th June: the Catholic Shrine Church of Our Lady of Consolation and St. Francis, West Grinstead, home of the 'Secret Chapel', celebrated the 150th anniversary of the solemn opening of the current church which took place on the same date in 1876.

The day began appropriately with pilgrimage. One group walked from Horsham to West Grinstead replicating the first pilgrimage in modern times in 1880. Another group walked from the old railway station in West Grinstead to the shrine, again following in the footsteps of the thousands that used to come from London by train until the 1960s.

At noon, a Mass was celebrated by the Most Reverend George Stack KC*HS, Archbishop Emeritus of Cardiff, together with Canon Tim Madeley, the Rector; Fr. Tristan Cranfield, Parish Priest of St. John's Horsham; Fr. Aaron Spinelli, former parish priest of Horsham and West Grinstead and Fr. Roderick Jones OSB representing the Abbot of Worth Abbey. Music was provided by the Church Schola (choir) and the visiting choir from the Parish Church of St. Gabriel's, Billingshurst, all accompanied by organist Stuart Miles.

In his homily, the Archbishop reminded the congregation that this Shrine Church is of significant importance as it was 'the underground church that fed the spiritual needs of the persecuted faithful in Sussex'.

It was the first Catholic Shrine of Our Lady to be established in England since the Reformation. This was because throughout the time when

King Henry VIII and his successors broke with Rome and under the continuing persecution of Catholics during the Recusancy years, Mass was secretly said in the 'little house in the wood'.

This was nothing more than a shepherd's hut with a hayloft where priests came secretly to minister to the people and say Mass. One such was Arthur Bell (religious name Francis) an English Franciscan priest who trained in France. He was later caught elsewhere, imprisoned in Newgate and hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn. Today, Blessed Francis Bell is revered and remembered at Our Lady of Consolation when pilgrims come to visit the Secret Chapel which is now incorporated into the presbytery.

The 170 or so people who came to join in the celebrations were treated to lunch and other refreshments in the Pilgrims' Way where a fascinating pictorial history of the church was on display.

(Kate Robertson & Canon Tim Madeley)



Faith, Fun, and (Very Fast) Feet:

St. John's Summer Picnic

Sunday 12 July, Horsham Park was filled with laughter, sunshine, and the unmistakable sound of a parish priest running for his life, or at least for rounders glory.

It was our annual summer picnic of course, organised this year by the Community Life lead of our relatively new Community Mission Group, a team dedicated to supporting the wider mission of the parish.



Families arrived armed with picnic blankets, picnic food to share (and the odd bottle of prosecco), and the afternoon unfolded exactly as you'd expect: parishioners settling into the sun and welcome shade during our recent heatwave, catching up, and enjoying good food in good company.

There was something for everyone, of all ages as children queued for face painting, all wanting England flags in support of our football heroes, others played a make-shift egg-and-spoon race; reimagined with tennis racquets standing in for spoons and sent balls flying in every direction. And, by the time the rounders match began, competitive spirit had well and truly taken over.



Needless to say, none of us knew Father Tristan had that turn of speed in him!



What shone through the most though, wasn't the games, or the cake or the competitive spirit filling the air... it was who was playing them. Grandparents cheered along with toddlers. Parishioners teamed up with parishioners they'd never spoken to

before. Mothers cradled each other's babies and fellowship flourished in the shade of our beautiful picnic spot where our parish felt like family.

Same time next year, and then, maybe give Father a head start.

Crawley Deanery Youth Ministry Gathering

On Saturday 12th September, catechists, youth group leaders and those involved in pastoral care from across the deanery came together in Horsham to discuss closer collaboration on future youth events and gatherings.

Led by Lizzie Wakeling, Diocesan Youth Advisor, the meeting focused on sharing local experiences, exploring mutual support structures and addressing the growing number of young people requesting opportunities to encounter Jesus. We continue to gather momentum and create a regular programme of events to bring together groups of young people outside of catechetical formation.

The next deanery youth meeting is scheduled for Saturday 21st November. The gathering is open to interested adults, young leaders, and anyone involved in youth ministry. For further details, or to be kept informed of developments, contact jordandevitaylor@gmail.com

The Relics of St. Gerard Majella Come to Horsham

This Autumn St John the Evangelist, Horsham had a very special occasion in the diary. In his 300th anniversary year, the relics of St Gerard Majella came to St John's and Horsham responded with a turnout that filled the pews in prayer.



Parishioners and visitors arrived for private prayer, confession and veneration of not one, but two first-class relics of the saint of St Gerard Majella, a rare and moving privilege, and one not lost on those present.

Fr. Royston Price CSsR, a Redemptorist and custodian of the relics

on their tour of parishes across the country, gave the homily, and it was a real highlight of the evening. Fr. Royston has a gift for making history feel immediate and relatable, the story of a poor, sickly boy from southern Italy who knotted his bedsheets together to escape a locked room and follow his vocation is dramatic enough on its own, but told with warmth and wit, it became something the whole congregation could hold onto. He reminded us that Gerard was a lay brother who swept floors, answered doors, cooked, gardened, and sewed habits, and that sanctity is built from the unglamorous work of showing up faithfully, day after day, in whatever role is asked of you.



It is that same humility which makes Gerard so beloved as "the mother's saint." Falsely accused in his own lifetime and bearing it, he has become, in the centuries since, patron of expectant mothers, of children, of the unborn and the falsely accused, a saint which the walls of his shrine at Materdomini testify to, covered with photographs of, as Fr. Royston affectionately dubbed "chubby Italian babies" and blue and pink ribbons pinned in thanksgiving. It was fitting, then, that so many in Horsham came forward after Mass, not only to be blessed but to bring rosaries, medals, wedding rings and other cherished objects to be blessed alongside them, a queue that stretched back through the church, with many returning with more items to be blessed, and spoke louder than any attendance figure could.

The evening did not end at the church door. Parishioners carried the joyful experience into the Hall afterwards, where Fr Tristan Cranfield and Fr. Royston shared refreshments and conversation with all who stayed. Fr. Tristan commented on the evening:

"It was the kind of evening where the intent of those present was unmistakable; the atmosphere deeply prayerful and reverent, a clear reminder of why all were there. Not simply to mark an anniversary on a calendar, but to live as



St. Gerard did: to surrender to God's will as fully as he did, and all we prayed for his intercession to help us do so. St Gerard himself left us these words he famously marked above his door: "Here the will of God is done, as God wills, and as long as God wills."

As St. Gerard's relics move on now to the next parish, Horsham was glad to have hosted them and gladder still for what the visit left behind.

St. Gerard Majella, pray for us!

ADVENT TAIZÉ SERVICE

SAT 12th DEC

6:30 - 8:00pm

Corpus Christi
Church
Henfield
BN5 9PE

ALL WELCOME

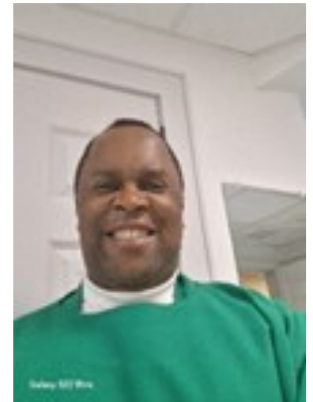


Welcome and Goodbye!



At the end of October, the Deanery says farewell to Fr. Jack Lusted who retires as parish priest of East Grinstead and Lingfield.

We are delighted that Fr. Louis Ezeilo has agreed to move over from Horley and take Fr. Jack's place. We wish both of them every grace from God in their new situations and we promise to pray for them.



To submit news and events from your parish for possible inclusion in future editions, then email Kathy Bishop at: kjmbishop@yahoo.co.uk



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