

## **SVP Conference Report April 2018 - 2019**

Birtley St Joseph conference currently has six members (one member has recently joined) and we generally meet once a month following the 10:00am Sunday Mass. Meeting dates vary depending on the availability of the members as members are involved in other activities in the parish. The conference recently purchased a “pay as you go” mobile phone and can be contacted through this on the number 07561 190396.

### **Activities**

We visit several people in the Parish and some members are involved in activities outside the parish.

Two members help out at “Vinnies” the SVP Blackfriars drop in centre at Newcastle and several people in the parish also help out there. One member helps out at Joe’s Place (another drop in centre) at St Joseph’s Church Hall in Gateshead. The conference donates money to Blackfriars to buy Christmas gifts for hostel residents and 3 members have attended the Winter Ball and the Ceilidh along with other parishioners.

Two members help out with the rota of SVP members in the TCC area who collect food (mainly sandwiches which would otherwise be thrown out) from a Pret a Manger shop on Grey Street and distribute them among the SVP approved premises in Newcastle.

One of our members who works for Bidfood was instrumental in the Bidfood Gateshead Depot adopting the SVP as their charity of the year for 2018 and this was hugely beneficial for Blackfriars. Bidfood supplied food and a new freezer to Blackfriars which helped greatly with the storing of food. Bidfood “Charity of the year” status also brought offers of help from Bidfood customers with chefs coming in to Blackfriars to work with the kitchen staff and also to mentor, train and demonstrate kitchen and stock management skills.

There are two “official” Mini Vinnie Groups in the parish at St Joseph’s and St Benet’s Junior Schools and we have good relationships with all these groups. The Mini Vinnies make a welcome attendance at the Conference organised annual Mass for the Housebound on alternate years. St Benet’s attended in 2019 and St Joseph’s will attend in 2020. The Mass for the Housebound is a wonderful parish occasion where the invitees attend Mass which is followed by afternoon tea, a raffle and bingo in the parish centre. The children love the Bingo and usually win some raffle prizes.

An event which St Joseph’s SVP organised in 2018 was a Dementia Friends evening in October. This was an interactive evening which gave an insight into dementia and also gave valuable information on how to deal with people suffering from this awful disease. Attendance on the evening was disappointing but the people who did attend found it very informative.

Other work performed by the conference includes paying for taxis so disabled people can get to Mass. We have also recently been able to help several people who have contacted us through Father Paul. We wish to do more work around the parish.

The arrival of Father Paul arrived has meant that we have been contacted when people have arrived at the presbytery door usually asking for money. We try to help everyone who comes.

The conference has been twinned for a number of years with a conference in India and we have recently adopted a new twin in the Sudan. We had rather lost contact with the twin in India but contact has recently been re-established. This year we sponsored twin after one of the local conferences went into abeyance. Over the last 2 years we sponsored two street children for a year and two children for vocational training for two years. This year we are sponsoring 8 street children on the VJS (Vidya Jyothi Scheme) which is a £15 one off payment to educate street children for a year. Another important connection is with the Sudan Babies Appeal to which we contribute every year.

The SVP is very strong in the Kerala district of India which was badly affected by floods in the summer of 2018. The conference made a donation to the SVP Disaster Fund to be used for rebuilding work in Kerala.

One member of the conference also helps out at the SVP Ozanam camp at Holy Island. The conference also normally provides money for a sponsored place for a child.

We are very lucky to belong to a parish which is very generous to the SVP. We are very grateful for the donations at our regular collections and coffee mornings.

We in the SVP continue to be grateful for the help of everyone in the parish. We hope that we have wisely spent the money which we have been given. We never forget that the money we spend has been donated. We have worked in the parish for many years and hope to do so for years to come.