

Anglican-Lutheran Society Annual Meeting 2019

St George's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Southwark, London

Welcome

Our Anglican Moderator, Bishop Michael Ipgrave, welcomed everyone and invited the Dean of St George's Roman Catholic Cathedral to tell us something about its history and significance.

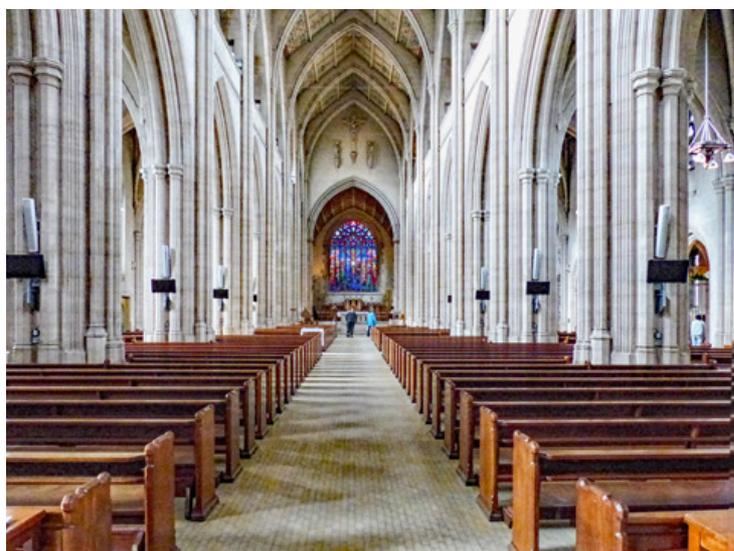
Canon Richard Hearn (pictured here) explained that St George's has an important place in the history of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. The Catholic community had been meeting for worship in a building down the road but Fr Doyle, the priest, decided a new church was needed. The land around that part of Southwark was very marshy so it was cheap! So St George's Field was purchased which is where the church got its name.



The original cathedral building was designed by the great Victorian architect Augustus Pugin to seat about 2,000 people, and it was opened by Bishop Wiseman on 4th July 1848. Like many of Pugin's churches it was rather dark inside.

The church thrived and two years later Pope Pius IX restored the English hierarchy and St George's was chosen as the Cathedral Church of the new Diocese of Southwark, which was to cover the whole of Southern England. For the next half-century, until the opening of Westminster Cathedral, St George's was the centre of Catholic life in London.

All went well until the night of 16th April 1941, when the Cathedral was hit by an incendiary bomb, starting a fire which destroyed the wooden roof and much else. The adjoining Amigo Hall, in which our meeting was taking place, was undamaged and temporarily became the pro-cathedral.



The architect Romilly Craze was commissioned to rebuild the cathedral in the Gothic style and work began in 1953. Canon Hearn explained that from the outside the building is quite unimpressive, but inside he considers it very impressive, especially the stained glass at the East and West Ends made in the 1950s by Harry Clark Studios in Dublin, and the more recent ones commemorating the visit of Pope John-Paul II and the Order of the Holy Sepulchre which is based in the cathedral but supports the work of the church in the Holy Land.

The rebuilt cathedral was opened on 4th July 1958 and was consecrated by Bishop Cyril Cowderoy. It was taller than the old cathedral had been because an extra layer of windows was added to provide more light inside. The downside was that what Canon Hearn described as 'a forest of thick pillars' was needed to support the roof. These rather restrict the view of the sanctuary from the side aisles. On 28th May 1965 the diocese of Southwark was elevated to a metropolitan see and Bishop Cyril Cowderoy became the first Archbishop of the new Archdiocese of Southwark.

Today the congregation of St George's reflects the rich cultural and ethnic diversity of South London. As well as frequently hosting important diocesan and national celebrations, the Cathedral is often used for concerts and other events, and boasts a rich musical tradition, maintaining a choir of boys and men, and a girls' choir, both of whom sing at Sunday Masses and on major feasts. The organ, by Compton, is regularly used for recitals.

The cathedral works ecumenically especially with the Anglican Cathedral in Southwark and they are celebrating the document 'Walking the Way Together' by experiencing each other's liturgies, and there are close ties with other traditions as well. For that reason Canon Hearn said that we were particularly welcome to hold our Annual Meeting at St George's and he wished us a very fruitful day.