



DIOCESE OF
WESTMINSTER



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Residential Retreat Centre for Children and Young People



SPEC started life at All Saints Pastoral Centre, in London Colney

History of SPEC

SPEC The Project

SPEC opened in 1993, at All Saints Pastoral Centre in London Colney, Hertfordshire. The project arose from the vision of Father (now Monsignor) Vladimir Felzmann and Cardinal Basil Hume who were inspired to provide a residential centre to support and encourage young adults' initiatives in the diocese. It would be a place of peer ministry: the young ministering to the young. The name 'SPEC' comes from the Latin 'speculum vitae' which translates as 'mirror to life'.

Over the years the demand for retreats grew and SPEC expanded into more buildings and to a wider age range. Initially envisaged as a place for the 16-30 age group, the opening of The Loft in 1998 saw this range extend to primary aged children as young as 7 years.

In January 2011 the closure of All Saints Pastoral Centre was announced and the search began for a new home. In March 2014 SPEC moved to new premises at Waxwell Farm in Pinner, which had previously been occupied by the Grail Community.

Waxwell Farm History

The oldest part of the building at Waxwell dates back to the end of the 16th Century. An extension was added towards the end of the 19th Century, built in a style sympathetic to the Tudor original.

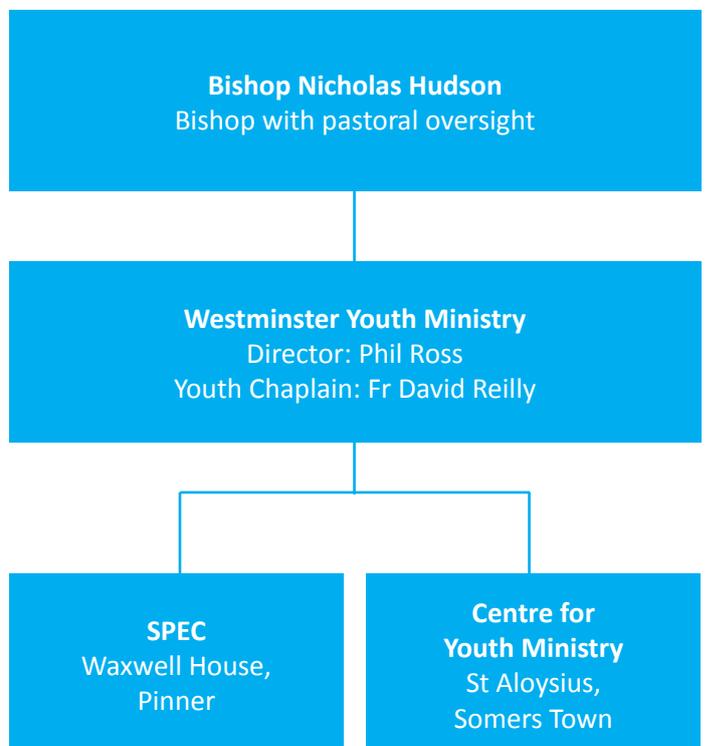
In 1947 Waxwell Farm House was purchased as a gift for the Grail Society who occupied it until 2011.

In 1957 the chapel and what is now an accommodation wing were built and the round hall (currently derelict) was added in 1963. Waxwell Farm was purchased by the Diocese of Westminster in 2010 and became SPEC's new home in March 2014.

SPEC as part of Westminster Youth Ministry

SPEC is an integral part of the Diocese of Westminster's provision for children and young people, operating within Westminster Youth Ministry and working closely with colleagues based at the Centre for Youth Ministry, near Euston.

Structure



Vision for SPEC

SPEC is the Diocese of Westminster's residential retreat centre for children and young people in parishes and schools of the diocese. It is also a Catholic community made up of families, singles and young adults who are intentionally living together as brothers and sisters in Christ and whose primary mission is fulfilled through our retreat ministry for young people in the diocese.

At the heart of the vision for SPEC, from its inception in the early 1990's, has been the idea of peer ministry: young people ministering to other young people. The witness of a community of young adults, living and sharing a life of faith, is a powerful one and thus community has always been at the heart of the vision.

In recent years we have sought, inspired by the diocesan vision for youth ministry, to be more intentional in how we live as community and how we provide a journey of formation in faith for the community, in particular our volunteer missionaries. This is in recognition of the value of such an authentic witness to the children and young people who visit us on retreat.

The vision also uses the story of the road to Emmaus as a model for accompaniment which we seek to emulate at SPEC in the way the core community 'disciples' the volunteer missionaries and how they, in turn, accompany the children and young people who visit us.

We are also inspired by the call in *Redemptoris Missio*: "Today the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed. Today all Christians, the particular churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit."

Our objectives

1. To provide a residential retreat facility for young people and children in the diocese, focussing in particular on:
 - parishes.
 - primary schools.
 - secondary schools.
2. To form (in faith) and train (in youth ministry) a cohort of young adults (our volunteer missionaries) with the expectation that the training/formation will:
 - enable them to properly and effectively contribute to the retreats that SPEC runs.
 - prepare them for - and encourage them towards - active ministry in the Church, either voluntarily (e.g. in their home parish) or professionally.

Our method

1. Having a resident community of staff and volunteer missionaries (VMs) living, praying, working and playing

together as brothers and sisters in Christ while following a shared rule of life on a journey to holiness.

2. Using the ministry - and effective witness - of the young (our volunteer missionaries) to the young (the children and young people on retreat).
3. Spiritual formation for all community - but especially the VMs - through ring-fenced time, planned input, retreats, discipleship, community prayer, involvement in Catholic events and life in the diocese and, of particular importance, the celebration of the sacraments.
4. The presence and witness of people (especially young adults) living a range of vocations: single, married, ordained etc.
5. The presence and witness of families.
6. Presenting the joy of authentically living - counter-culturally and with confidence - an orthodox Catholic way of life, celebrating the beauty of what the Church has.

Our Retreats

A retreat is essentially a time when the retreatant stops their usual activities, to go to a quiet place for prayer and thought, in the hope of an encounter with the living God.

We provide residential retreats for children and young people in the schools and parishes of the diocese, to supplement any formation and catechetical training that is taking place in the home, the parish or the school.

All our retreats aim to provide:

1. a welcome into a home, into a form of family and into our life and rhythm of prayer.
2. a physical environment that is conducive to the retreat programme by being attractive, inspiring, functional and safe.
3. content based on the deposit of faith and the lived-out experience of the community.
4. encouragement towards ongoing participation in the faith life of their parish and school.
5. for schools:
 - a theme for each academic year decided through a process of prayer and discernment.
 - different retreats for different age groups: Year 5-6, 7-8 and 9-13. Every visit by a young person to SPEC should be a fresh one.
6. for parishes:
 - sacramental retreats to complement parish catechetical programmes, including a choice of retreats for confirmation candidates.
7. a structure which includes presentations, activities, liturgy, time for reflection, social time and, where appropriate and possible, the sacraments (Holy Mass and Reconciliation).

Community

The witness of community life

Life at SPEC is lived out in community, responding to God's invitation to a full life in Christ and the call to evangelisation. Sharing a desire to live an authentically Catholic life, our community lives, prays, and serves together, all for the Glory of God. The communal life offers a safe, yet challenging place to live out our faith. On a human level, the communal life offers us the opportunity to grow in our understanding of healthy relationships with a particular focus on brotherhood and sisterhood. Weekly community events, men's and women's nights, recreation and leisure all serve to enrich our lives as we journey together towards Christ.

Core community

The core community of resident diocesan employees provides the continuity of community life, into which we welcome our volunteer missionaries. Good working relationships are underpinned by regular time together, including times for prayer. Many of the recent initiatives that have added so much to our ministry have arisen through our times prayer and discernment where we have aimed to allow the Holy Spirit to speak into our decisions and guide our actions.

Volunteer missionaries

Every year a group of young adults age 18-25 are welcomed into the SPEC community to spend a year in formation, evangelisation, and a life of holiness. These young adults commit to living an authentically Catholic life in community while being formed in their call to holiness. Each volunteer missionary brings their own unique gifts, talents, and skills to share the gospel with the young people of the Diocese of Westminster who come to SPEC on retreat.

Prayer

Our life in community is centered on our rhythm of prayer. Gathering daily, both in the mornings and evenings, we wrap our days and lives in our relationship with the Father. While embracing the richness and variety of the Church's traditions of prayer, we maintain a particular focus on the sacramental life of the Church, particularly in the celebration of the Mass and daily prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Our daily communal prayer consists of: 0800 - Lauds; 1700-1800 - Vespers and Holy Hour (vespers replaced by Rosary walk on Wednesdays and Taizé or praise and worship on Fridays); 2100 - Compline.

Formation

We have recently welcomed a new member into the core community with a focus on developing the spiritual formation programme for the community, in particular for the volunteer missionaries. Our rhythm of prayer is itself formative with the formation programme adding an intentional dimension. At the core of the programme is ring-fenced time for input during

our weekly 'non-contact' days. In addition we have visiting speakers, community retreats, get involved in faith-based events in the diocese and encourage personal prayer, enquiry and study. Our aim is to help each person grow in their identity as a son or daughter of God while journeying deeper into the various aspects of a life in Christ.

Rule of Life

Since 2012 we have followed a 'rule of life': this way of living helps us to root our lives in Christ Jesus. A life in Christ calls for dying to self and living in the Spirit. St. Paul exhorts us to put on the Lord Christ Jesus. Following a rule leads us to form certain Christ-like habits, transforming us into witnesses of the Gospel regardless of our age, location, or state in life.

Support staff

The resident community relies heavily on the service provided by our support staff who, during their working day, are as much a part of SPEC as those who live here. The support staff team is currently small: administrator, groundsman and cook/maintenance. Their efforts and collaboration frees the resident community to focus more closely on our ministry to the young people who visit us. When the new retreat building is completed the support staff will expand considerably to include housekeepers and a catering team.

Structure





SPEC Volunteer Missionary modelling for WYM's new range of clothing



Artist's impression of the new residential building



Faith formation in an important part of community life



Bishop Nicholas Hudson with the SPEC community

Retreats

Why go on retreat?

Going on retreat is often a big step for a young person. It is an occasion where they take their faith - often fledgling - outside of its normal environment and express it in another forum. This is a further step towards being able to 'confess the name of Christ boldly, and never be ashamed of the Cross'. (CCC 1303)

The retreat experience allows the young people a time and space 'set apart' from normal life to be intentionally with God and with each other. It is often through a retreat process - in a space free of distractions - that the young person is able to have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus and to discover a personal connection to the love of God and His Church. The retreat is thus an opportunity for them to listen, to contemplate what God is calling them to and to respond to God speaking into their heart.

The retreat process allows the young person an opportunity to:

- share in the life of a praying community, being invited to join in with the SPEC community's cycle of prayer.
- reflect more deeply on what they have been taught at home, at school or in their parish catechetical programme.
- consider what they truly believe.
- experience a personal encounter with the Lord through the Sacraments and a variety of prayer experiences.

The retreat process allows the retreat group to grow as a community by:

- letting the retreatants step back from the world and allowing the time to reflect on the group culture so that it is less conformed to worldly values.
- providing an environment that builds trust and models behaviour which encourages and supports each other.
- learning more about each other's strengths and gifts.
- establishing a stronger sense of 'belonging' that will encourage more commitment to parish life.

Retreats at SPEC are led by one of our employed retreat leaders, supported by a team of young volunteer missionaries (aged 18-25) who have committed to a year or more in the SPEC community, sharing in its ministry and rhythm of prayer and undergoing their own journey of spiritual formation. This structure allows for the experience of the staff member to be complemented by 'peer ministry', through the enthusiasm and example of volunteers living a shared life of faith that is a witness to living in opposition to many of the worldly values which permeate our society.

Who we cater for

When fully operational our new retreat building will allow us to return to providing retreats for the same age range as we did before SPEC moved from All Saints Pastoral Centre.

Parishes	Primary Schools	Secondary school
Residential and day retreats for confirmation candidates	Residential retreats for Years 5-6	Residential retreats for Years 9-13 Day retreats for Years 7-13

Until the new accommodation is completed - e.g. for the 2015-16 academic year - we are able to offer the following:

Parishes	Primary Schools	Secondary school
Day retreats for confirmation candidates	No provision	Day retreats for Years 7-13

Group size

The maximum group size is 32 retreatants: this is based on a normal maximum class size and is also a group size that is conducive to a more intimate retreat atmosphere.

Days that we offer retreats

Based on demand, our normal operation is currently mostly term-time. We do not run any retreats on Mondays: this is a non-contact day for the community to focus on formation, training, preparation for retreats and time together as community.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
None	Schools	Schools	Schools	Schools	Parishes	Parishes

Parish confirmation Retreats

There are three confirmation retreat 'themes' that are offered at SPEC. Each of the retreat themes can be run as a day retreat or a residential retreat.

It is the residential retreat that allows the optimum retreat experience for the confirmation candidates, allowing the young people to journey deeply with God and with each other. A residential retreat also allows more time to experience the Sacraments with the opportunity for sacramental reconciliation and Mass being integral parts of the retreat.

Confirmation retreat theme options

Catechetical programmes, whilst attempting to encapsulate the core of the faith, vary substantially in terms of the content; and for this reason we have developed three different retreat themes. It is not the intention to replace but rather to reinforce teaching: parishes can choose the retreat that best reflects the character of the catechetical programme that it runs with its young people.

'Come follow me'	Our response to Jesus' call to discipleship, to "Come, follow me".
'We are family'	Exploring the relational nature of God with a focus on the Trinity.
'Unveiled'	Exploring the truth and beauty of the sacraments.

School retreats - streams and themes

Each year we design a new set of retreats for school groups. This brings several benefits, including:

- Every year is 'fresh' and the chances of a young person returning to us and experiencing the same sessions is thus removed.
- The retreats are mostly led by the retreat leaders who designed them.
- We can respond by developing retreat themes that we discern are most appropriate for that period in time.

Each year the core community, with some assistance from the volunteer missionaries, enters into a time of prayer and discernment in the hope and expectation of being prompted by the Holy Spirit as to the theme we should follow for the year, and how that should be manifested in the retreats we design. We certainly feel that blessings have emerged through this openness, in the planning process itself and in the success of the retreats, evidenced from the positive feedback that we have received.

Since we started this methodology, our themes and retreat titles have been:

Year	Theme	Year 5-6 retreat	Year 7-8 retreat	Year 9-13 retreat
2012-13	Year of Faith	Noble Adventure	X-treme	Epic
2013-14	Called	Invited to the Banquet	Who do you say I am?	Called
2014-15	Hope		Coming Home	Refuge of Hope

For 2015-16 the theme will be based around the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as instigated by Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus*. As in previous years, the theme will form the foundation for three different retreat programmes for three different age groups.

Premises

The existing buildings, set on the edge of 7 acres of green-space, are providing an enriching environment for the day retreats that we are running while waiting for the construction of a new residential retreat building near the heart of the grounds.



Current buildings

The Tudor, Victorian and 1950s buildings are the home for the community and the space where we currently run day retreats. Some of these spaces - especially the chapel - will continue to be used for retreats when the residential building is complete both for practical reasons and to retain for the retreatants the sense of welcome into a community home.

The Chapel

The chapel is at the heart of our community, strategically located between the community accommodation and the 'public' areas. We feel very blessed to have inherited such a beautiful chapel and to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved there. The chapel was built for the Grail Community and officially opened in May 1957 and dedicated on 28 April 1958. The architect, FX Verlade, also designed the local parish church of St Luke, and there are distinct similarities in the design of both. On the sanctuary there is a beautiful tapestry of the Last Supper by Luc Van Hoek and at the other end a stunning depiction of the Stations of the Cross. The altar contains a relic of St Thomas Becket who was in Pinner on the night before his martyrdom at Canterbury.

Other rooms

The Library is used as the main meeting space for groups coming on retreat. With comfy chairs and sofas, the Grail and Beckett rooms are used for small-group activities. The name of the Calefactory comes from the heated sitting room in a monastery where the monks or nuns would go to warm up: we use it for community meetings and as small group room. The Group Refectory is another panelled room and is the place where our visiting groups can relax and enjoy their packed lunches.

Grounds

The undulating grounds range from manicured lawns and diverse flower-beds to more 'wilderness' areas with wild plants and other abundant wildlife. Although the grounds are smaller than at our previous home, they feel expansive because of the sheer variety of terrain. There is ample space for the more active groups to run and kick a ball around as well as quiet paths, glades and seating areas for those seeking a more subdued time.

New build plans

The new residential retreat building is designed to allow us to run two concurrent residential retreats during the school week for primary and secondary groups, with up to 32 retreatants each, and one confirmation retreat at weekends, again of up to 32 retreatants.

Sleeping accommodation

- Older age groups – confirmation retreats and secondary school retreats – will be accommodated in 4-bed en-suite rooms.
- Primary school groups will be in dormitory accommodation, as they were in The Loft back at All Saints Pastoral Centre.
- Supervising adults will have a mixture of single and twin en-suite rooms.
- There is one enabled en-suite room for visitors with disabilities.

Retreat spaces

- There will be large spaces for whole-group activities designed for younger and older age groups, plus a range of smaller group rooms decorated and furnished appropriately for the different age-groups.
- The kitchen and refectory - which looks out over the front veranda - will cater for visiting groups and the SPEC community in two sittings.

Sustainability

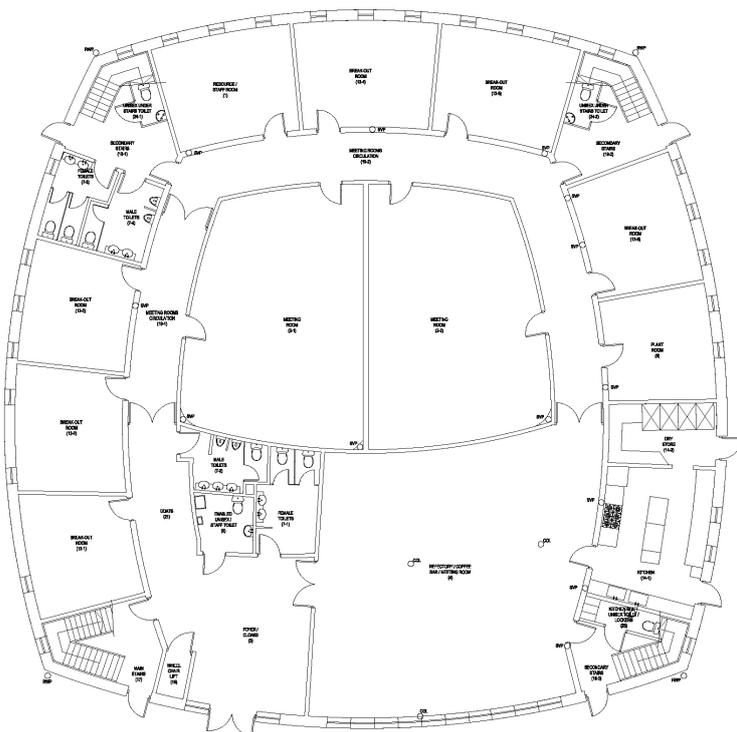
- Very high standard of thermal insulation.
- Low temperature underfloor heating throughout provided via a ground-source heat-pump.
- Ventilation heat recovery via a heat exchanger.
- Electrically efficient: e.g. LED lighting throughout.
- A 'brown bio-diverse roof installation' to replace lost habitat.
- Timber-clad in colour stained oak – requiring little maintenance and to complement this woodland setting.

Security and safeguarding

- There will be secure access to the building via an electronic card-access system. Groups will also have controlled access to their own accommodation and retreat spaces through this card system.

Timescale

- It is hoped to start construction in summer 2015 with completion to allow an opening for autumn term 2016.



Feedback

“They have bonded with each other well; and I feel that this will strengthen them not only in school but in the parish too.”

“Some of them have said how encouraged they were to see other young people in the team giving of themselves to others.”

“It complemented our teaching at school, reinforcing all the messages.”

“The retreat went beyond my expectations, and I found it very useful in seeing how the leaders delivered meditation and the use of drama for the parables. The children genuinely felt it was the best school trip they had been on and lots of the children said they felt closer to God and now had a much better understanding of prayer.”

“The testimonies brought reality to discipleship and the personal relationship that we have with God.”

“Thank you all for answering God’s call to mission and sharing your faith so enthusiastically. Our confirmandi have been inspired, encouraged, and renewed. The catechists too!”

“Beautifully led, rooted in prayer and fun. The team at SPEC do an amazing job.”

“We’ve had lots of positive and encouraging feedback from the students; reflecting how much they enjoyed the various events. The retreats were clearly a resounding success. May God bless you all in the important work you do – giving witness to the Gospel and nurturing the faith of young people in the Diocese of Westminster.”

“Can I say what a fantastic retreat we had on Friday. I think it was our best ever trip to SPEC the girl’s had a fantastic and enriching time. Can you please pass on my thanks to all the team for the wonderful work they did.”

“Some pupils only have one stereotypical idea of what ‘church’ means. [the retreat] Enabled a positive alternative.”

“Exceeded my expectations.”

“A good balance between fun, activities, learning and prayer times.”

“My expectations were more than met, I feel very positive about how the whole programme will have a lasting effect.”

Possible future initiatives

Possible future initiatives that may be considered include:

- Recommencing First Holy Communion retreats for parishes.
- Extending residential retreat provision for school years 7 and 8.
- ‘Open’ retreats for young people at 6th form age.
- Retreats for parish catechists, youth leaders and teachers.
- Young adult retreats.
- Extending retreat provision into half-term and other school holidays.
- Space for ‘own programme’ self-led retreats.
- Summer camps.
- Family retreats.



spec

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