

ST PETER'S CRICKET CLUB – LIGHT OF FAITH TOUR 2016

(press briefing Tuesday May 31st)

St Peter's Cricket Club, also known as the Vatican XI, is preparing for a second British tour this September with both ecumenical and interfaith objectives high on the agenda.

Two years ago, in September 2014, the newly founded team of Rome based Catholic priests and seminarians from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and England travelled to the UK to play against a Church of England side, the Archbishop of Canterbury's XI. The game, played at the Kent County Cricket ground in Canterbury, ended with a narrow victory for the Anglicans. A return match, played in Rome in the autumn of 2015, saw the Vatican team taking back the St Augustine cup.

On September 13th the two teams will meet again at the Kent ground to further their sporting friendships and to pray together again in Canterbury Cathedral. Following that match, both Catholics and Anglicans will travel to Edgbaston in Birmingham to play a tournament that includes the Mount Cricket Club, made up of Muslim players from West Yorkshire, on Thursday 15th.

The following day, St Peter's Cricket Club travels north to Yorkshire, where players will visit a mosque and conclude the second 'Light of Faith' tour with a T20 match against Mount Cricket Club at the famous Headingley ground which has been used for international test cricket since 1899.

The Vatican team will also start the tour with another interfaith engagement, playing on Sunday 11th at Woodford Wells Cricket Club near London against a team comprising Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Buddhist players who work closely with the Essex Cricket Board. A number of local community and faith leaders will be in attendance

The tour also enjoys strong backing from the England and Wales Cricket Board which supported the Mount CC's ground-breaking trip to play the Vatican XI in Rome last summer. ECB Chief Executive Officer Tom Harrison said: "Cricket brings people together from all backgrounds and across communities and this is a great example of the power of the game. We've loved this project from the moment we heard of it and this tour has our full backing. We'd particularly like to praise Yorkshire and Warwickshire for giving the Vatican XI players the incredible opportunity to play cricket on Test Match grounds."

Set up in 2013 under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Culture, St Peter's Cricket Club was the brainchild of the former Australian ambassador to the Holy See, John McCarthy. The goals of its team members are to share their faith with others, to build bridges across religious and cultural divides and to further what Pope Francis calls 'the culture of encounter'. Members of the many different cricket teams that have played against the Vatican XI over the past two years in Italy and in England have found a depth of faith and warmth of hospitality that has made a lasting impression, beyond the shared pleasures of the sporting experience.

The 2016 'Light of Faith' tour will continue to promote that message that the combination of sports and spirituality provide a powerful incentive to unite people of different religious backgrounds. St Peter's players will be seeking to showcase Pope Francis' words to the

International Olympic Committee recently, when he said: “Sports tend to unite rather than divide” and are a vital way of “training for peace, mutual sharing and harmonious coexistence of people.”

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