

Canterbury and Rome prepare for cricketing showdown



The game may take place at Lord's Cricket Ground (Tim Ireland/PA Wire)

Church of England has agreed to play a cricket match with the newly formed “Vatican cricket club”, with Lord’s cricket ground as the planned venue.

The announcement was made today at a press conference hosted by Archbishop David Moxon, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s representative in Rome.

The match is scheduled to take place in September 2014, probably at the “home of cricket”, although Lord’s has yet to be officially approached.

Known formally as the St Peter’s Cricket Club, the Vatican team members will be made up of priests and seminarians drawn from various colleges in Rome and Vatican offices. Similarly, to ensure a level playing field, the Church of England side will be made up of “ordinands and those associated with theological colleges”, Archbishop Moxon said.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, welcomed the initiative in a telephone call to Archbishop Moxon today.

“He said he was delighted by the idea, is looking forward to seeing the teams playing in England, and he appreciates the partnership, the sense of playfulness, and friendship,” Archbishop Moxon said. Furthermore, he said Archbishop Welby hopes it will “raise money for charity” and joked that he had “forgiven the Australian cricket team”.

The Australian side recently thrashed England in the latest Ashes series in Australia.

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, formally wrote to Archbishop Welby earlier this month requesting the Anglican leader’s consent for the match.

“We are convinced that the game being played between teams of these, our two sisterly Churches, would evoke much attention and would also be an opportunity to witness our common faith in the Lord through a sport shared so many,” he wrote.

Recalling how his dicastery has been looking for new ways to promote dialogue between the Christian faith and contemporary cultures, he said that he had “discovered” that “one of the gateways to the English-speaking world is through the cricket pitch as the game appeals to millions of people of all faiths and cultures”.

John McCarthy, Australia’s ambassador to the Holy See, who first had the idea of creating the Vatican side, said he was “thrilled” at the “generous response” of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

“We now have a whole new game that is part of the cricketing calendar,” he said. “One of my Christmas wishes has been achieved – seeing this game come about.”

The St Peter’s Cricket Club was formed in October this year under the patronage of the Pontifical Council for Culture. Matches between various teams at the Vatican will be played between March and May, from which a 1st XI side will be formed to play the Church of England.

The newly formed club hopes to play against sides made up of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and other

faiths in the future.

During the press conference, a match cricket ball was presented to the Church of England as a “symbol of challenge in the spirit of competitiveness and friendship.”

Edward Pantin - Catholic Herald