**POSSIBLE ITEM(S) FOR “EASTERN LINK” REGARDING COVID -19**

Roger Stroud, married to Theresa. rogstroud@aol.com

Swindon Circle 231 & Joint Brother of North Glamorgan Circle, both in Province 12. On Saturday 2nd May 2020, at the Province 12 AGM installed as the Province 12 Vice President & also 5 year as Provincial Membership office and continuing for another year.

In response to you asking for a photograph’ one having lunch near Carcassone in South West France.



|  |
| --- |
| **Some additional information**  Swindon Circle is on the eastern edge of the Province, in the county of Wiltshire. Probably one of the few places you will have heard of in the county is Stonehenge a ancient prehistoric site, in Wiltshire about an hour’s drive from Swindon.  Stonehenge tunnel plan approved: Facts about the ancient monument ...  Swindon is the home of the European manufacturing site for Honda cars, but sadly the site will be closing in 2021. It was the home of the famous railway works of the Great Western railways, founded by Brunel. Brunel was famous for building steam trains, steam ships, bridges and tunnels. The railway works closed in the seventies. In more recent times Swindon became famous as a good distribution centre for companies, home to three pharmaceutical companies, building society headquarters, home of the National Science based Research Councils. The famous “mini card bodies have been manufactured in Swindon for over sixties years, still remains here, but has passed on from being part of a British company to now being owned by the German company BMW. Part of the Railway works is now the home of Steam, which is a large railway museum and another part of the old buildings is now the home of the Outlet shopping centre and people come many miles to shop here. Interestingly the “Outlet” has also improved the attendance at one or two of the Swindon Formal Circle events and dinners, as quite a few ladies from our Welsh circles love to combine attending our events and visiting the shopping centre which is handily only about 2 miles away.  Swindon circle is the second largest circle in the Province, currently with 49 Brothers, with several visiting gentlemen, one who is waiting for things to get back to normal so he can be enrolled into the circle and a brother from the North Midlands, who now lives in Swindon and is waiting to be enrolled as a joint Brother.  Province 12 is truly a Multinational Province, with 7 circles in England, 6 circles in South Wales and our newest circle, Monmouth Wyedean which is half in Wales and half in England. By British standards it is quite a large Province Stretching from Swindon in the East to Swansea in the West. They are approximately 120 miles apart, with 110 miles being on the M4 motorway, the journey time between them in the rush hour is about three hours but late evening the return journey only takes about two hours.    England and Wales are joined by two bridges that span the River Severn. They are both magnificent structures, which until two years ago had a £6.60 toll charge, but now they are free. We know from the Catenian logo, that the organisation is represented by a strong chain circle that bonds our circles together and as a Chemist I know that the strongest chemical structure is circular and made up of alternating single and double bonds and is known as Catenation (honest). From the picture you can see that the two bridges linking the English and Welsh parts of our Province are large suspension bridges made of strong steel and concrete and they are key to the Province and strongly bond all our circles together, which I believe makes Province 12 unique within our international organisation.  Some of our circles are in large cities and towns – Bath, Bristol, Cardiff, Gloucester/Cheltenham, Newport, Swansea and Swindon, some are in country towns Abergavenny, Cirencester, Hereford, Penybont (Bridgend) and Weston super Mare and two Circles are deep in the countryside Monmouth Wyedean and North Glamorgan. |

**TO DEAL WITH YOUR LETTER PUBLISHED IN MAY 2020 CATENA –**

**Dealing with the challenge of life under Covid-19 Restrictions**

**How we are staying connected with our Circle Members?**

In Swindon, when we realised that it was going to very serious, we contacted all Brothers and widows, including a widow whose husband hadn’t been in our circle, but who had moved into the area to ensure that we had there up to date addresses, email addresses and telephone numbers. After updating the information copies were provided to everybody in the circle and to the widows.

Brothers are encouraged to ring other Brothers in the Circle, to see how they are copying and if they need any help with things, including shopping and prescriptions for medicines that they regularly have to take.

We tend to have two or three Brothers who regularly contact the widows, probably every week or every fortnight. We try to remember their birthdays. Interestingly and it is worth mentioning here, some Brothers and widows prefer to be rung by Brothers that they have known for quite a few years rather than Brothers that they don’t really know.

As a Provincial Councillor and Officer, I personally try to ring 2 or 3 Brothers from around the Province every day and I know quite a few other Brothers around the Province do the same. As the Provincial Membership Officer, I tend to have a list of Brothers who are in the central circle who either live somewhere in the catchment area for our province or even further away, but whose closest potential circle is in our Province. I have rung these Brothers in the last few weeks, to see how they are copying with Covid-19 and to see if they are interesting in joining a circle in our province in the future or would be interested in making a virtual visit in the coming months.

In addition, as a joint member of North Glamorgan circle that is based very rurally in Wales and is the smallest circle in the Province I try to give them support in many ways, including helping with the organisation of their Christmas dinner and the Provincial darts competition that they organise and host.

At this time, I am trying to encourage circles to regularly contact their local priests to see how they are and if there is anything that the Catenians can do to help them. These days for priests in the UK it can be a lonely existence and we should try to support them as much as possible at this difficult time. Afterall they are best placed in the Parish to be our salesman for the Catenians. Interestingly we have a new priest in our Parish, who was previously Parish Priest at a church near our next closest circle. After Mass during his first week at our church, I went to say “Hello” and welcome him and as I approached he looked at me and said “You’re a Catenian” and just behind was another Catenian and he said “You’re a Catenian as well”. We did invite him to our next Circle meeting and dinner, but unfortunately Covid-19 got in the way.

**Are we still meeting (online)?**

Swindon circle has got organised very quickly. We are using Zoom. (I will talk about Zoom and other means of communication more fully separately to this). We quickly took the decision to install the new circle officers, by telephone. The retiring President called the Vice President and installed him as President and the new President called separately the one or two new officers to install them.

It was decided to do a trial run of the April meeting using zoom and about 50% of the circle joined in.

Then we continued with a full-blown council meeting a week later, which went very well. By this time we had created a new role within the circle of “technical officer” to deal with setting up for each meeting, looking after all technical aspects so that the President could concentrate on the chairman’s role and the Secretary, could take the minutes.

As I write we are about to have our virtual May circle meeting. The technical officer taken out a Zoom professional membership, which brings additional useful options. We have a potential joint member “visiting”, along with at least 6 or 8 Brothers from across the Provincial booked in.

Across the Province, there has been variable approaches.

**Installation:** Some circles have installed their officers using telephone, zoom and even by email, some haven’t yet and may delay until everything is back to normal, one circle has decided to keep their current officers for another year and two circles, meeting in March, decided to install their new officers, slightly early at their March meeting.

**Council meetings:** Quite a few circles have started having zoom council meetings and others are still thinking about this, and most other circle councils ring around each other.

**Circle meetings:** A number of circles are introducing zoom circle meetings, others are thinking about it and some have decided to wait until they can return to meeting face to face.

**Are we still sending out newsletters?**

The Brother who produces our Circle newsletter, has decided to have a well earned rest for a few months, as we have cancelled all social events at this time.

However, Provincially it has been decided to produce a good news newsletter to bring some positivity at this difficult time. So far it is looking very good and has been well received in the Province. The person who produces it can already be called the editor, as he has enough material available to have to make a decision on what to include. As some of you will know, some newsletters never get to the point where the editor gets a chance to use their editing skills!

**ZOOM**

 

For the vast majority of us, it was only a few weeks ago that we first heard about Zoom. By now certainly in Australia and Great Britain there cannot be too many Catenians who have not heard of Zoom. If somebody had written in Catena this time last year predicting that in a year’s time the world would be struck down by not just an epidemic but by a pandemic virus. All Catenians in the world would be living in lockdown, with those in Australia and Britain aged over seventy isolated at home and Catenian Council and Circle meetings would be conducted from home by computer, tablet or smartphone, we would all have burst out laughing. A year ago if you asked a Catenian what did Zoom mean to them, only the keen photographer who offer an answer, “ telephoto lens” and if you asked your younger grandchildren they would answer “Ice Lolly”!

I am sure that most of us have already decided that we either “Love It” or “Loathe It” and many have been struggling to understand it.

There has been quite a lot of confusion in the UK in relation to Zoom.

Just like any other organisation, different people have different views and some of them strong views, which can sometimes spread into the public domain courtesy of email. I know there have been instances where one Brother will say it must be Skype and another will say it must be Zoom, whilst others in the email trail will be wondering what is Skype and what is Zoom. My impression is that in UK and Australia everybody seems to have finally decided on Zoom.

The instructions written and circulated can be confusing, especially if the author is a smartphone user and the recipient has a laptop or desktop user or vica versa.

I have seen a four point instruction, where one point mentions how to gain the attention of a President, using the electronic hand sign and another how to gain the attention of the chairman by raising your hand and holding it near your camera. I think that someone has cut and pasted two documents together and not read what it says. If anybody has zoom meetings where the President isn’t the Chairman, please let me know and feel free to put me right on the need to have two different signals.

Interestingly, from some documents I have read from both UK and Australia, I think that in Australia the waving of one‘s hand infront of the camera is to indicate that you wish to speak and the electronic hand is used exclusively when voting and in some UK circles the waving hand is used to attract the President’s attention to a question and in others they use the electronic hand.

Quite a few times I have heard Brothers say that Zoom can do a specific task or operate in a certain way and someone else says, no it cannot. In the last couple of weeks, with the help of several kind, helpful Brothers and one or two come to mind, who I should be calling Zoom Guru’s. I am now understanding much more about Zoom and why , “It can do this” or “No it can’t do this” discussion is becoming quite complex. There appears to be a free version and two different pay versions. In addition for each of these there are different versions that run on smartphone, tablet, laptop and desktop, and it there may be a UK version and a USA version; not sure if there is an Australian version as well?

Life was once so easy, if you wanted a Zoom, you just had to decide if you wanted a telephoto lens or an ice lolly.

Actually, I had one outstanding aspect that I spent a long time waiting for the definitive answer to, relating to an area of Zoom that is causing me some concern. It is probably the same in all other Catenian Provinces. We have some brothers, who don’t have a computer, a tablet or a smartphone, but they may have a windows mobile or an ancient mobile phone, and there are others who don’t have a camera or a microphone on their computer or laptop and there are some, certainly in UK, who have a very, very slow internet connection or a major internet problem in their town or small village and are waiting for a new cable to be laid and they don’t have a very good mobile phone signal either. These Brothers cannot use zoom and for these Brothers I have real concerns. Whilst we have Covid-19 around the longer it is likely to be that brothers over 70 and those with major underlying health problems will not be able to attend face to face meetings. In UK there are one or two Scientific experts who believe that those over 60 are relatively high risk, even if they have no major health problem and should undergo social distancing for a longer period. If this approach is adopted a very high percentage of Brothers won’t be able to attend face to face meetings. With my Provincial membership hat on, I have a real concern that those Brothers may well feel that they are being isolated, deprived, by the Government and the Catenian Association and may decide not to return to their circle. Some circles may even be forced to close own.

Sadly, I have been told it must be Zoom as we must be able to see each other’s faces. We have Brothers in our province who have very poor vision and further afield I have met totally blind brothers including one who was the Grand President some years ago, I don’t know how they would feel if they hear this comment. I did suggest there was a simple way around the issue, which I call “ Zoom attendance via a Zoom Buddy”. The person with zoom access, uses his landline phone to call a zoom enabled brother on his landline, which the enabled Brother then puts on speaker phone mode and places it between his speaker and his microphone, so everybody on the call can hear the zoomless Brother when he talks and he can hear them. This was deemed not acceptable, we must see their faces.

Interestingly during a zoom meeting of some of the council, one Provincial councillor was obviously having trouble with his microphone as we couldn’t hear , so I went into Zoom buddy mode and called him on my landline and he successfully participated in the meeting and told me later that it was so simple what I did and perfectly acceptable to him. Since then at a circle council meeting the same thing happened and I did the same. My problem is like many of you, I am an exponent of the KISS principle (Keep It Simple Stupid) and I thought that our association was caring and inclusive, and not into excluding our Brothers.

I was also been told by several people that on some Zoom systems there is the facility to join a zoom meeting my using a landline phone and you can participate by speech without a picture. One of the zoom guru’s has been looking into this and recently confirmed one can do this if you have the Pro version of zoom costing £11.99 + VAT per month.

|  |
| --- |
| **Covid-19 Worries for a Provincial Membership Officer and How to deal with Them** (Added by Roger)  A number of circles have contacted me in the last six weeks or so, concerned about losing Brothers during the Covid-19 pandemic for two main reasons because we are not meeting up face to face for circles meetings and social events and secondly because if we do try to fill the void with virtual Circle Council, virtual Circle meetings or virtual social events, due to not possessing the right technology, not having specific hardware or not having a reliable internet connection or mobile signal some Brothers will be virtually excluded from their circle. When things return to normal it is quite likely that our Brothers in these circumstances will decide to leave our organisation and our Provincial numbers will drop by a significant amount. Each quarter I look at our Membership statistics and as a rule of thumb tend to class Circles with an average monthly attendance of less than fifteen Brothers as a circle that is beginning to struggle and needs support from me and the bigger circles in our Province. At this time, of the fourteen Circles in our Province, seven circles fit into the struggling category with an average circle attendance of 14 Brothers or less, with two averaging ten or less. The quorum for a Circle meeting is 7, so several circles will be in a grave situation if they lost say 4 Brothers. There is a real concern about a significant loss of Brothers and I know that at least one circle is thinking about the possibility of merging with another one.  At this time it is vital that we put all our energies into our Provinces and Circles, creating Positivity and being Inclusive to our Brothers, Wives and Widows. As mentioned elsewhere Province 12 is producing a fortnightly newsletter with good news and positivity. Some circles actually installed their new officers at their March meeting as they expected that circles would not be able to meet for some months. Other circles installed their new officers using email or zoom and others are waiting until they are meeting once again face to face.  What circles need to do is to decide what is best for them and it will vary from circle to circle. When making these decisions it is important that circles make the decision based on how they will retain the most Brothers. They need to decide what is right for them.   1. **One to one communication with all brothers,** but especially with those who could fade away from continuing as a Catenian. In the circle email is one option, but the better more personal option is by picking up the telephone. 2. **Is it important to continue with Council meetings**? The best option here is have council meetings and to use zoom. Another way is for the President to ring individual members of council, but it is less efficient and doesn’t allow for discussion. 3. **Is it important to continue with Circle meetings**? From talking to circles, it appears to work best with smaller circle and less so with larger circles, just because of the numbers involved. Circulating reports in advance of the meeting is probably more effective. What is important is to make sure that those without computers, appropriate hardware, no wifi connection, or very slow speed should be able to access it, either with the zoom landline access version, or by using a zoom buddy and a landline. There is a very good procedure available that is specific to zoom circle meetings. If you would like a copy please send an email request ([rogstroud@aol.com](mailto:rogstroud@aol.com))   **Other suggestions**   1. **A circle social evening conducted by zoom.** Brothers, wives, widows and evening potential new Brothers and their wives could attend. People could eat and drink if they want and the content is up to you, amongst the content being used is Just chatting to catch up, having a quiz, someone talking about a specific subject, reading a poem, singing a song, playing an instrument, playing bingo, a couple of people mentioning things they have done, two being true and one untrue. E.G. 1. I was involved in designing a needless injection system for vaccines; 2. I passed my driving test on my 17 birthday; 3. I went to Japan for 8 days, all expenses paid to give a 15 minute talk in English to a group of Japanese science teachers. ( By the way number 2 was untrue. 2. **A circle social evening involving 2 circles.** 3. **A circle social evening, slightly more formal** by including prayers for the sick of the circle and the province and an informal welfare report from those who have phoned other members of the circle. 4. **A virtual Circle Vocations Mass streamed from a local church.** Swindon Circle are planning to do this later this month and will be inviting other circles to join them.   IF YOU HAVE ANY OTHER PLANS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE, PLEASE EMAIL rogstroud@aol.com |