

Minsteracres Retreat Centre (MRC) has operated as a separate registered charity since January 2012.

Previously, it had been operated as part of St Joseph's Province of The Congregation of the Passion, a worldwide congregation of Roman Catholic priests. St Joseph's Province set up the company and charity with a board with a majority of lay trustee/directors and a minimum of two Passionist priests.

The charity has three charitable objectives, which are as a continuing expression of the Passionist ethos to reach out to those on the margins of Church or society:

1. operate the residential retreat centre which includes a retreat programme prepared and delivered by the Rector and volunteer retreat team as well as mainly Christian groups arranging their own retreat programmes;
2. provide an Outreach programme which brings groups of refugees and asylum seekers, carer groups and others on the margins to Minsteracres for respite days or stays. The Outreach Co-ordinator is supported by a team of volunteers in delivering the programme for the service users; and
3. the conservation of the house (Grade II listed) and extensive grounds.

In 2022, St Joseph's Province amalgamated with St Patrick's Province (the Province). The Province retain ownership of the freehold of Minsteracres. MRC has the benefit of a 30 year lease of which 19 years remain.

The Board operates a series of sub committees covering Governance and HR, Finance, Fundraising, Retreat Programme, Marketing and Environment.

The staff include a Retreat Centre Administrator and assistant, a Catering Manager/Chef, an assistant chef and 3-4 part-time kitchen assistants; a housekeeping supervisor with two assistants, an Outreach Co-ordinator and an Estate and Buildings Manager with an assistant. We are presently recruiting for a full-time housekeeping supervisor.

MRC is assisted by the valuable contribution of a body of volunteers who bring a range of skills and who help either in the dining room or in the conservation of the grounds and sometimes in the office.

It is a feature of the work of the centre and the commitment of the staff that all work flexibly across appropriate roles if the occasion requires.

The Centre is at its busiest between March and November. Consequently, the chefs are appointed on annualised contracts enabling the longer hours worked over that period to be reflected by shorter hours in the quieter months.

For residential weekends, guests arrive usually around 4-6pm and leave after lunch on Sunday. It is beneficial for the General Manager to be part of the Friday evening welcome and as part of a rota be available for larger groups on a Saturday morning to deal with any queries which may require attention after the first overnight stay.

Immediately adjacent to the Main House is the RC Church of St Elizabeth's. This operates as part of the RC Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and is part of the Grade II listing and the lease to MRC. The parish are very supportive of the Retreat Centre and there is a close relationship between the two organisations.

The grounds consist of open parkland, shrubbery, ponds and walled garden and the Peace Garden. This is an area created since 2012, which is available for retreatants and on two days per week is used by a separate charity called Let's Get Growing which uses horticulture to provide activity days for dementia sufferers. LGG work closely with MRC in delivery of MRC's Outreach programme.

The Walled Garden is looked after by the Estates team and the conservation volunteers. An office within the garden is let to a separate charity called HeartwoodCharity, which offers free person-centred therapeutic group counselling in a natural environment for people experiencing complex and enduring mental health problems. Heartwood use part of the grounds for their group activities.

There is another quasi charity active on the site, which is Tynedale Horticultural Services, which is an arm of the social services provision of Northumberland County Council. The dedicated team provide gardening services and other day activities for service users with learning or physical disabilities or a combination of both.

All these relationships are part of the essential character of MRC in making use of the house and grounds for the benefit of people on the margins.

The Province has recently invested considerable capital in paying for essential and extensive fire precautions required by the Fire Authority (£187,000) (without which the centre would have had to close to residential guests) and in paying for the re-surfacing of the entrance drive (£84,204 plus vat).

The Province helps to provide the spiritual support for the Centre through the resident community led by the Rector. The Parish Priest for St Elizabeth's is also in residence, Both the Rector and the Parish Priest are members of the Congregation of the Passion.

The payroll function is outsourced to MRC's accountants, Azets who carry out the annual examination of the accounts and who assisted MRC is adopting the Xero accounting system.