

Eagle carried rings in our wedding service

IT was a massive surprise for the bride and groom on their wedding day – when a huge American bald eagle swooped into church with their wedding rings!

Sam Hains was tying the knot with Mike Poolman at All Saints Church, Catherington, when it got to the part of the service where the couple exchange rings.

Their best man started to look for the rings in his pocket and pretended that he couldn't find them. Just then, the bird of prey swooped in from the back of church with the rings in a pouch.

It had all been arranged by the mother of the bride, Lorraine Ercan, and kept a secret.

She had originally wanted to hire an owl for the big day. When that didn't work out, she hired an American bald eagle and a



Sam and Mike Poolman on their wedding day with the American bald eagle

handler only a few days before the ceremony, which happened over the summer.

The bride, who is now called Sam Poolman, from Waterlooville, said: "The best

man started looking in his pocket and then looked at me and Mike. Then I noticed there was a man standing behind me that I didn't

recognise. "The eagle came straight through the church and landed on the best man's arm with the rings

in a pouch. "I didn't know what to think, but it was a big surprise. It made the day even more special.

"My mum found it on the internet on the Wednesday before the wedding, as the owl she had originally planned had to pull out on the Tuesday. She did keep it a secret, although she did say there would be a surprise on the day."

The vicar, Canon Gill Hill said: "I've never officiated at a wedding with something quite like this before!

"The eagle flew into church and delivered the rings without a hitch. The bride's mother, who is a vet's assistant, planned it as a surprise because the bride is passionate about wildlife and animals.

"It was quite an experience and has given me a brilliant illustration for the parish magazine newsletter on Isaiah 40:31!"

I'm so proud of us all

THE last few months have made me immensely proud to be your bishop.

The last *Pompey Chimes* reported that I was moved almost to tears at the September Diocesan Conference, because it was so wonderful to be around people I love, engaging so deeply and eloquently with the mission and ministry to which we are called.

Not long before that, I heard the total for this year's Lent Appeal was up by around 50 per cent on last year's figure – a huge achievement for which I am immensely grateful to you all. See page 3 for more details.

Then of course there are the achievements we celebrate in the formation and training of ministers. The Portsmouth Pathway has now opened, training new Readers and ordinands locally under the leadership of the Rev Dr James Grenfell.

I firmly believe that this initiative will enrich us as a diocese, as ministers in training undertake placements in our parishes and chaplaincies, and as new people are challenged and encouraged to recognise



the last word

by Bishop Christopher

God's call on their lives and enter into training and formation.

All in all, this is a wonderful and exciting time in the life of Portsmouth diocese. These last months have reminded me that a core task and privilege of the church is to find ways to bless the world.

In church services it is the priest or bishop who gives the blessing – indeed we regard it as a distinctively priestly act. But of course all of us bless one another and our communities in a whole range of ways.

My colleagues at Bishops-grove, spotting when I am tired or working long hours and knowing that I am partial to fruit, will often leave a tasty bowl of raspberries or grapes

on my desk – a discreet way of offering me a blessing amidst a busy schedule.

I try in my small way to bless my colleagues with the occasional message and act of support to let people know they are in my thoughts.

In many and varied ways, often without much acknowledgement, you bless your communities by giving freely of your resources or love or time and talents in service of others.

As I give thanks with renewed appreciation for the privilege of serving as bishop in this most special of dioceses, I offer you my blessing and my love in your varied spheres of life and in the ministries you exercise.

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