

Record amount raised via Lent Appeal

DONATIONS FROM LENT APPEAL	
Bethlehem Arab Society for Reconciliation	£15,900
Meon Valley Carers Group	£300
Portsmouth OCD Support (via OCD UK)	£500
Depression Alliance Group (via national group)	£500
Portsmouth Mind	£500
League of Friends of Oaklands (Titchfield)	£600
Alzheimer's Cafe, Isle of Wight	£1,100
Solent Mind (Fareham and Gosport)	£1,250
Havant and East Hampshire Mind	£1,250
Independent Arts	£2,300
Off The Record	£2,300
Portsmouth Abuse Rape Crisis Service	£2,450
Veterans Outreach Service	£2,450
TOTAL	£31,400

GENEROUS worshippers from our diocese raised a record amount via the Bishop's Lent Appeal this year.

A staggering £31,400 was raised – 50 per cent more than last year – through sacrificial donations and fundraising events in our parishes.

Bishop Christopher said: "This is a huge achievement, for which I am immensely grateful to you all. It is a tangible sign of how committed we are as a diocese to supporting the needs of people in our communities and the wider world."

As usual, the money will be split between an international charity and a local project.

This year, the international charity chosen was Bethlehem Arab Society

for Reconciliation (BASR), which works across Palestine and provides surgery and rehabilitation for victims of violence.

Bishop Christopher led a pilgrimage for our curates earlier this year, which included a visit to BASR, and the curates were available during Lent to speak about their experiences in the Holy Land. Some of their reflections also went online.

The other half of the appeal fund has been split between local charities that help people with mental health problems. We're also working with our diocesan mental health adviser, the Rev James Hair, to raise awareness of these issues and the support available across our diocese.

Cathedral urges a generous welcome

CATHEDRAL clergy have urged Portsmouth's civic leaders to consider a more generous approach to asylum seekers after criticising a council motion.

Portsmouth City Council passed a motion asking the Home Office to remove them from a list of designated areas where asylum seekers could be housed. It urged other towns and cities in the south-east to do their bit to help.

The motion mentioned pressure on local services, including school places. But there are actually only five asylum-seeking children of school age currently in the city.

The dean of our cathedral, the Very Rev David Brindley, said: "Portsmouth City Council has passed a motion which is unworthy of the city. Its rejection of asylum seekers is mean spirited and narrow minded. The cathedral has generous hospitality as one of its core values, and we are proud that this has always applied to the whole city.

"Our Christian perspective demands that we see all people to be made in the image of God and of equal worth. Offering a home to a small number of people and recognising that asylum seekers have much to offer to the city is demanded by our common humanity.

"Portsmouth has a long tradition of multi-cultural harmony, and this decision undermines that history. It is disingenuous of the council to have focused on unaccompanied asylum seeking children as the main issue – currently there are five such children in the city.

"This seems to fly in the face of the recent outpouring of support and care from ordinary people in Portsmouth to those in Calais, and other places, as evidenced by the success of the Don't Hate Donate campaign and others. City and cathedral should both show generous hospitality and a spirit of welcome to those in the deepest need."

Meanwhile, churches in our diocese have continued to support efforts to help asylum seekers and refugees. St Mary's Church, Portchester, is the latest to have organised a collection of food, clothes and vital supplies for those waiting in Calais.

Your generosity helps vital group

THEY started the group 19 years ago because their own children had mental health problems – and it's still going strong.

Heather Watts and Irene Bromley launched the League of Friends of Oaklands to give support and company to adults with severe and enduring mental health issues.

It meets weekly in Titchfield Community Centre, where members share a meal, learn domestic skills and make friends. For many of its 60 members, the group is a godsend – it's the only place they feel comfortable and loved.

Bishop Christopher visited the group to donate £600 from this year's Bishop's Lent Appeal to their work. This small sum will keep the group going for six months. It was just one of several mental health charities that benefitted from this year's Lent Appeal, which raised a record-breaking amount.

Half of the money went to an international charity – the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation – and the other half was shared between local mental health charity groups.

"I have two sons who have mental health problems and are going blind," said Heather, "Duncan was a medical student and training to be a doctor, but he became ill in his first year. He was



Bishop Christopher meets Simon Randell as he prepares pudding

very poorly and it was difficult because he could understand what was happening. He was in hospital for four years.

"There are groups, but they only meet for a limited time – six weeks or so. I found Irene, whose son had been ill for some time, and we wanted a group run for members and by members. We all do everything here, it's like a family, and we all have a say.

"We used to meet three times a week, but we no longer receive any government funding, so it is just on a Monday. Members help to shop, and help to make a two-course meal, involving fruit and veg, and help to wash up. This may be the only cooked meal they have in the entire week. It also

helps them to learn skills they need around their own homes.

"There are some people who need to catch two buses to get here, but they still won't miss it. They come from Warsash, Gosport, Bishop's Waltham and Portchester to get here.

"There are more people who need this kind of group, especially as other mental health centres keep closing. But we also need more volunteers to help us, as we're not getting any younger. You don't need any special skills, just to be able to listen."

And Irene said: "It's the only group my son will come to. Heather deserves a medal for all she has done."

Members are referred to the

group via their care co-ordinators, and tend to make their own way to the centre. Simon Randell, 51, from Fareham, said: "I enjoy people's company, especially the bingo and raffle, and I've made a lot of friends here. I like to make the puddings, especially something like Eton mess."

And Mary Marsh, 54, who also lives in Fareham, said: "I like the social side, and having a balanced dinner and pudding. And I like coming to the countryside because I live in a town and appreciate seeing the country as I cycle here. I've learnt how to cook better."

If you would like to volunteer to help, please contact Heather on heatherwatts7@aol.com.