

# Celebrating 150 years of devotion

**HE came to lead a special service – and ended up serving us all soup.**

The Archbishop of Canterbury came to thank the Sisters of Bethany for 150 years of prayer and service.

The Sisters – our diocese's only religious community – celebrated their anniversary with a special Eucharist in our cathedral.

The Most Rev Justin Welby preached and presided, showing his commitment to the religious life. And afterwards he showed his own inclination to serve others, by rolling up his sleeves and serving soup to many of the 600 worshippers who attended.

In his sermon, he said: "It is a great privilege to be at this service, and I feel very honoured to share it with you.

"The anointing at Bethany would have attracted a little bit of attention. But the vast majority of those who lived anything more than a few hundred yards away would never have been aware that it happened. It was unknown, unseen.

"Yet it's one of the lynchpins, one of the turning points of the Gospel of St John, the point which focuses the mind forward to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

"There seems to be much call in this nation, at this time, for the visible, the grand gesture, the quick solution, the strong answer. But it is the hidden that is essential.

"It is what is seen in the sight of God that is essential. What you are, what you have been, what in the grace of God you will be, is as essential, if not more so, than ever it was.

"The church in this country at this time, if it's going to be one that can respond, must be one that is immersed in prayer and the religious life, because without that we have nothing to bring. But it must be one that is deeply committed to unity – to seeking unity, to praying for unity, and to being willing to suffer.

"Your calling to pray for unity is one which the church needs more and more, at a time of increasing conflict – of the martyrdom of priests at mass in France, of those



caught up in Germany, of a Coptic priest in Egypt. These attacks bring us back to the importance of the religious life."

Members of religious communities from across the UK attended the service – including those from other denominations.

They joined Mother Rita-Elizabeth in singing the *Te Deum* as it finished. She also acted as cantrix during the service. The community's chaplain, the Rev John Preston led the prayers.

He said: "The Archbishop did a wonderful job of recognising

**Justin Welby serves soup; left: images from the service**

who we are and giving us hope for the future. One of the issues religious communities are facing is declining numbers, but there are more and more people wanting to be associated with communities. We have many associates and oblates seeking to live like the Sisters in daily life."

The Sisters of Bethany community was established in 1866 by Etheldreda Anna Benett, and was the first C of E community to offer retreats for women. There are currently eight Sisters based at their Southsea convent.

Their history includes the running of an orphanage in Bournemouth until 1939, where more than 100 children were educated. In the 1890s, four Sisters were sent by the then Archbishop of Canterbury to Syria to instruct women in the Orthodox faith.

The Sisters ran retreat houses in Bournemouth, Winchester, Hindhead and Whitwell on the Isle of Wight before coming together at the House of Bethany in 1998.

More recently, more than 100 people have become associates or novice oblates, leading a life of contemplative prayer in their own circumstances. The Order of Companions of Martha and Mary, based in Lancashire, are now also part of the Bethany family. The Sisters also reach nearly 8,500 people online.

## Let's walk and cycle to raise vital funds

CYCLISTS and walkers will be out in force for the annual day to raise vital funds for our church buildings.

Ride and Stride, which is organised by Hampshire and the Islands Historic Churches Trust (HIHCT), happens this year on September 10.

Volunteers will be sponsored to visit as many churches as possible on the day. They'll get there by bike, on foot, or via car, bus, mobility scooter or even horseback. Worshippers will open their churches for the day and provide a welcome and refreshments.

Half the cash raised goes directly to the church nominated by the person being sponsored. The other half goes to HIHCT who then allocate grants to churches in need of repair.

Last year 400 churches across Portsmouth and Winchester dioceses opened, of which 135 were fundraising. A record £60,000 was raised. Walkers and cyclists from St Mary's, Buriton, and St Peter's, Petersfield, raised £2,700 between them.

And in the past three years, more than 20 churches in our diocese have received grants. Among them was Holy Trinity Church, Fareham, where the trust's chairman Lady Joan Appleyard, attended a celebration event.

For more information, see [www.hihct.org.uk/ridestride](http://www.hihct.org.uk/ridestride).

## An easy way to help our local schools

OUR diocese is encouraging worshippers to show they care for staff and pupils at local schools via a new initiative.

'Pray, Bake, Read' is a strategy that has been pioneered in Lichfield diocese. Now we're encouraging our parishes to do the same.

It involves worshippers committing themselves to praying for their local schools on Sundays or during a midweek group; baking a cake for the staff each half-term; and listening to pupils read once a week.

Details and helpful tips are available online at [www.discovery.portsmouth.anglican.org/pbr](http://www.discovery.portsmouth.anglican.org/pbr)