

# Experience God in the wilderness

**WHEN Andrew and Hannah Goy experienced a miscarriage, they realised they needed something other than songs of praise.**

After talking to others who were suffering, they saw there was a need for something less celebratory and more reflective to help them engage with God authentically.

The result was 'The Wilderness', an alternative worship experience which has been developed at Church of the Good Shepherd, Crookhorn, where Andrew is curate.

Visitors walk into a room with atmospheric lighting, ambient music and a variety of prayer stations. Thought-provoking images are projected onto screens, and worshippers can use all their senses to engage with God at their own pace.

Last month's theme was water, so there were bowls of water to wash in, the sound of running water from a fountain, and candles floating in water on the altar. Visitors could dip their toes into the baptism, water plants or pour themselves glasses of drinking water.

Churchgoers and non-churchgoers could wander in during four different sessions – Sunday night, Monday morning, Monday afternoon and Monday evening – to unwind and relax with God for as long as they liked.

There were also three other spaces within the church – coffee and chat in the Hub, prayer ministry in a separate room, and a corporate act of quiet worship in another room.

Andrew said: "When Hannah and I went through the experience of miscarriage, we realised that songs of celebration and triumph weren't quite right for us at the time. Other friends had experienced infertility and felt similarly.

"The idea of the Wilderness is that it is a space where people can find God at their own pace. No one is going to preach at them, and they can stay here for anything from 15 minutes to two hours.

"It's designed to be a safe space for people who might be suffering from depression or bereavement, or just to come before God to say



**Visitors at The Wilderness in Church of the Good Shepherd; left: Sophie Jones uses candles on the altar to reflect**

installations. She said: "It's amazing. I can tune out here, because there's nothing else going on in my head apart from these excellent prayer stations."

And Freya Hargreaves, 16, said: "I love it. It's a really intimate environment where you can relax. It's really peaceful and makes you think of a garden."

The next Wilderness sessions take place on the evening of November 27 and during the morning, afternoon and evening of November 28. See [www.cogs.org.uk](http://www.cogs.org.uk) for details.

"Things aren't great right now".

"We wanted it to feel very different to Sunday mornings, so we have low lighting, and rolling multi-media images, and reflective music interspersed with silence.

"It's only the second time we have done this, but we hope that people will feel they can invite friends who might feel

overwhelmed by church in future.

"The Bible is full of stories of the wilderness, from Israel's wanderings, to the 40 days Jesus spent there. It can be a place where God feels distant, but also a time of spiritual preparation."

Sophie Jones, 23, was one of those trying out the prayer

## Readers' service marks 150th anniversary



**Bishop Christopher with the new Readers after the service**

THIS was the scene in our cathedral as 11 new Readers were licensed to serve in parishes around our diocese.

And all our existing Readers were re-licensed, to mark the 150th anniversary of Reader ministry.

Bishop Christopher led the service last month, which saw licences for Paul and Marjorie Arnold in Liphook and Bramshott; Marilyn Gamblin in St Peter's, Bishop's Waltham; and Christine Hollis in St John's, Rowlands Castle.

## Students' exam joy in church schools

STUDENTS at our two C of E secondary schools have been celebrating excellent exam results over the summer.

Pupils at Charter Academy in Portsmouth and Christ the King College in Newport discovered their GCSE results and A-level results. For Charter Academy, these were the first A-levels taken since it launched its new sixth form two years ago.

The headline figure for the percentage of students passing five GCSEs with A\*-C grades, including English and maths, slipped at Christ the King College from 68 per cent in 2015 to 64 per cent this summer. But a new measure called Progress 8 showing pupils' progress across 10 subjects rose from 0.15 last year to 0.34 this year.

The proportion of students with five A\*-C grades, including English and maths, also went down at Charter Academy from 73 to 67 per cent. The figure had risen over consecutive years since the school became an academy in 2009.

And 25 per cent of the first A-level students from Charter Academy to sit the exams managed three or more grades between A\* and B this year.

Meanwhile, the average points score and average grades of those taking A-levels at Christ the King College increased on last year's figure.

Among the best-performing were Freya Baxman, whose A\*, A and B grades mean she'll be studying medicine at Southampton University, and Jasmin Brooks, who will take up veterinary science after achieving grades of A\*, A and A.

It was also a special day for Derek Johnston from St Mary's, Portchester; Annie Martin, from Leigh Park and Warren Park; Ruth McCabe from St Jude's, Southsea; and Jill Phipps, from St Barnabas, Swanmore.

On the island, Shirley Brown and Tony Lawrence were licensed to serve in Lake and St Saviour's, Shanklin; and Sally Jarvis in All Saints, Ryde.

Readers are lay ministers who are licensed to preach and lead services.