

Locals are stars of our Nativity

THE last time that Dan White was in a Nativity play, he was a sheep. This time he's playing Joseph.

The 21-year-old is one of the cast in the Leigh Park and Warren Park Community Nativity, which will be staged next month. Both cast and backstage crew are a mixture of amateur actors from the church and local community.

They've been rehearsing weekly for the show, which will be performed in and around St Clare's Church, Warren Park, at 6pm on December 3, and 2pm on December 4.

The team have hired real camels and donkeys to be part of the production. The three kings hope to sit on the camels and process through the streets ahead of Sunday's performance.

Audience members can see the animals for free outside, but will need to buy tickets to watch the performance inside.

Dan, who lives in Buckland, said: "I had a text from my fiance's auntie, who lives around here asking if I wanted to be in a Nativity. I thought I'd go for it and see what happened. I have been going to drama school for 10 or 15 years, but the last time I was in a Nativity play, I think I was a sheep! It has been good fun."

Another non-churchgoer



Cast members (back, l to r): Alli Henry, Sandra Smith, the Rev Jonathan Jeffery and Louise Elkington; (front) April Elkington and Francis Vassallo

who has got involved is Alli Henry, who plays one of the storytellers narrating the action. She said: "The vicar chairs the board of our charity and asked me to get involved. I've never done anything like this before, but I like it because we can add our own touches if we want."

The script was written by Carolyn Owens, who leads the children's work at St Francis Church, Leigh Park. Her husband, the Rev Jonathan Jeffery, plays the leading storyteller.

Worshippers from St

Francis and St Clare's Churches are busy making props and costumes for the show. Some will be borrowed from the Havant Passion Play, which Jonathan and Carolyn also acted in last year.

Afton Jerred, who is the PCC secretary, is both assistant site manager and playing the part of the Angel Gabriel.

"Carolyn had already written the angel as being 6ft tall, so I think that's why she chose me!" she said. "Someone is making 5ft wings for me, which will look impressive.

It's great to have a mix of church and community people involved and we all seem to get on well."

The production is being supported financially by our diocese's Mission Opportunities Fund, which aims to kick-start projects to help parishes engage more effectively with their local communities.

Tickets will cost only £1. For details or to book tickets, see www.stfrancisleighpark.org.uk or ring Carolyn on 023-9247 5276.

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'God's Garden' is created for pupils



(back, l to r): Molly McNaugher, 10, and Alice Piesina-Blaber, 11; (front): Charlie Prior, 8, Finlay Boxall, 8, Kim De Salis and Isaac McDonald, 7

IT'S a haven of peace in the school playground where pupils can go to pray or to reflect.

Nicknamed 'God's Garden', the space in the playground of St James' C of E Primary School in Emsworth was refurbished with funds from St James Church.

The dedicated space includes a bench, greenery, and an image of a cross, which was created by teaching assistant Kim De Salis.

Headteacher Erika Biddlecombe said: "It gives the children a safe place they can sit if they need to talk, pray or reflect. Both children and staff recognise that if someone is sitting there, they may want to chat.

"It has been here for a couple of years, but it needed refurbishing, and St James Church kindly paid for it."



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