



Madi Surugiu presents her icon to her Romanian Orthodox priest

Icons courses attract students

STUDENTS from all sorts of backgrounds learnt how to paint icons at a Hampshire church.

Two separate week-long courses were led by iconographer Jackie Hunt at St Peter's Church, Soberton.

Among the students were a prison chaplain who came from Sydney in Australia, a retired priest who used to be the vicar there, and a worshipper from Southampton's Romanian Orthodox community.

Their work was displayed

during a weekend exhibition at St Peter's in the autumn. Many of the artists and their friends and families were able to see their work on display against the striking backdrop of the historic church.

Madi Surugiu, who painted an icon of the Virgin Mary and child for her Romanian Orthodox community, said: "Painting Mother Eleousa was like being overwhelmed by God's gracefulness. A moment to begin carving into myself, an uneven piece of wood covered in dust, in front of a

white board.

"Just then the board came to life and I was gazing in wonder at St Mary's tender features and the Divine Child. An amalgam of thoughts, feelings, insights, time for reflection and prayer.

"The icon is finished and is hanging now in the sanctuary of Romanian Orthodox St Jude's Church in Southampton."

Jackie is now planning three more courses for 2017, and a third of the places have already been taken.

How we looked at future of C of E

IT was a chance to discuss the future of the national Church - with someone at the heart of its Renewal and Reform agenda.

Canon John Spence spoke to our Diocesan Synod about the challenges faced by the Church of England and its plans to address them. John is chair of the Archbishops' Council finance committee, and chaired the 'Resourcing the Future' task force looking at how C of E finances are allocated from the centre.

He explained the challenge faced by the Church of England in terms of the steady one per cent decline in attendance each year, and the fact that there are parts of the C of E where no one on the electoral roll is under 70.

He described how research had identified what could make a difference to the Church's historical decline, and how action to address this had crystallised into its Renewal and Reform agenda.

"This is not a national initiative, but a way of enabling dioceses to implement their own strategies," he said. "We asked every diocese what would move us from gentle decline to growth, and the great thing was that every diocese had an aspiration to grow. That hadn't been the case before.

"Every diocese wanted to unlock the gifts of its lay disciples. And we also uncovered particular problems in more deprived areas, where there simply weren't the people on the ground who could volunteer."



Top: Canon John Spence speaks to synod members; below: members were able to discuss the issues in deanery groups

He outlined the different 'workstreams' created as part of the Renewal and Reform agenda, including his own Resourcing the Future one, which looked at how dioceses were resourced from the central C of E.

The others were looking at how we resource ministerial education;

how we inspire lay leaders; how we create and develop the leaders of the future; and how we develop our church schools.

He also specifically addressed the issue of finance. In 2011, 45 per cent of voluntary parish share paid to each diocese's central pot came from those over 65. And

the 'golden generation' of those paid pensions based on their final salaries is starting to die out. So the gap between what dioceses ask for and what they receive may grow bigger - albeit our diocese's collection of parish share payments is an impressive 98 per cent.

"It will be important for dioceses to retain tight financial discipline," he said "Although the Church Commissioners have historic investments of £7bn, these are tightly locked away to ensure the income is available for future generations."

After answering questions, he finished by describing his personal circumstances, including how he lost his sight in his 30s.

"You don't need eyesight to have a vision," he said. "My vision is to restore the risen Christ to the centre of this country and its culture again. It is up to us as individual Christians, not our bishops or clerics, to do this."

Bells of St Michael's are being rung again

RESIDENTS living near St Michael's Church in Ryde have been expressing their appreciation as its bells are being rung again.

The three steel bells at the Swanmore church were cast back in 1868, and the largest weighs approx 2.5 hundredweight.

Until a year ago, they hadn't been rung full circle for a very long time.

A team of Isle of Wight bellringers started ringing them for a Remembrance service in 2015, and then made some modifications to make them easier to ring.

Since then, they've been rung for special services and local events during the year, such as St George's Day, Isle of Wight Day, as well as anniversaries and even local residents' birthdays.

In August, the team started practising on the first and third Wednesdays of the month, from 6.30pm-7.30pm, and they now have a band of five young ringers.

In October, they held an informal three-bell striking contest with three teams entering from Brading, Ryde and Swanmore. This ran together with a Macmillan coffee morning in the church hall and a school art exhibition in church.

Tower tours took place in the afternoon and two more young ringers were recruited.

If you are interested in joining the ringers at St Michael's Church in Ryde, please contact Kieran Downer on downer1994@hotmail.co.uk.

For more information about bellringing within our diocese and how to sign up, see the website on www.wp bells.org.