

Pews packed for Christmas treats

OUR pews will be packed for this year's Christmas events and carol services – and you can join us!

Parishes around our diocese will be hosting candlelit services, children's events, dramatic productions and Christmas tree festivals as they celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Worshippers at **Harbour Church in Portsmouth** will give up their own Christmas Day plans to throw a special party for those who are homeless, lonely or vulnerable. The 15 volunteers will provide Christmas dinner in the Harbour Coffee House, below the refurbished department store that hosts their services.

Vicar the Rev Alex Wood said: "There's a lot of lonely people at Christmas time and we want to provide a safe place for anyone to come. We'll be putting on the festive works – turkey, stuffing and cranberries – but mostly we'll be offering a warm smile, genuine company and a great time."

Our **PO9 pioneer ministers** Barney and Sara Barron will do something similar at Park Community School in Leigh Park for the second year in a row.

They'll provide a Christmas meal, entertainment and games for those facing isolation or economic hardship. You can book your place via sarajb@hotmail.co.uk.

Seven venues in Brighstone and Mottistone will host more than 200 decorated Christmas Trees as part of the **Brighstone Christmas Tree Festival** from December 7-10.

This spectacular festival, which is now in its 21st year, has raised more than £110,000 for local and national charities over the years. This year's festival includes a Nativity Pageant, which sees locals acting out the story of Jesus's birth on the streets of Brighstone, plus a myriad of live music performances during the festival. Full details are on page 15 or www.bxtf.org.

The **Alverstoke Christmas Tree Festival** is now in its ninth year. St Mary's Church will be illuminated by 90 decorated Christmas trees from December 8-10, and live music will play throughout the festival. Admission



Left to right: Billie-Mae White as Dandini, Jonathan Jeffery and Stuart Holmes as the Ugly Sisters and Phoebe Jeffery as Prince Charming rehearsing for Cinderella

Families will enjoy festive panto

WORSHIPPERS from Leigh Park and Warren Park will stage a Christmas pantomime at the start of December for the whole family.

It is a retelling of the Cinderella story, with romance, fairy magic, pantomime dames and audience participation.

Vicar the Rev Jonathan Jeffery will dress as one of the Ugly Sisters, while his 16-year-old daughter Phoebe will be Prince Charming. Jonathan's

wife Carolyn Owens has written and is directing the show.

Stuart Holmes, from Leigh Park Baptist Church, who plays Ugly Sister Petunia, said: "I said yes to being in the panto so long as I looked as little like a woman as possible. So the beard is staying."

And Billie-Mae White, 15, who plays Dandini, said: "I enjoyed it last year when I was an angel, and Phoebe is my best friend. So we banter

on stage just like we do in real life. Everyone's enjoying rehearsals, and it's really fun."

This year's panto builds on the success of last year's **Community Nativity Play**, which included the Magi riding real camels around Warren Park.

It will be staged in **St Clare's Church** at 2.30pm and 6pm on December 2, and 2.30pm on December 3. Tickets are £2 or £1, available on 023-9247 5276.



The Rev Emmanuel Nazir blesses the shoeboxes before they leave St James Church, Milton

is £3, children are free.

The Christmas Festival at **St Cuthbert's, Copnor**, will run from December 1-3, and will feature more than 200 Nativity sets.

There's a dressing-up area, where children can retell the Nativity story, and festive refreshments. Entry is free and it's open from 10am-4.30pm on Friday and

Saturday, and 11.30am-4.30pm on the Sunday.

St John's Church in Newport is holding an Angel Festival from December 1-9, which includes a film night, an 'angel drive' and an Advent Service. Full details are on page 15. **Portsmouth Cathedral** will host three identical carol services on December 21, 22 and 23 and two identical crib services on Christmas Eve to cope with the demand.

Meanwhile, worshippers at **St James Church, Milton**, sent 108 decorated shoe boxes filled with Christmas goodies to disadvantaged children and young people in Eastern Europe. It was organised with the charity Mustard Seed Relief Mission.

For details of all our Christmas events, see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/christmas.

Curates will head for the Holy Land

CURATES from around our diocese will head for the Holy Land in January, for a pilgrimage led by Bishop Christopher.

They'll spend time in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Gallilee between January 10-17, walking where Jesus walked and learning more about Biblical history, geography and culture.

It's the second time the bishop has led a pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine for curates as part of their training and preparation for future ministry. The last set of curates travelled there in 2015.

They will fly to Jerusalem and spend the first four days there, visiting the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane and the Via Dolorosa. There is a chance to see the Dead Sea Scrolls and the tomb of Lazarus.

The clergy will cross into Palestinian territory to visit Bethlehem, seeing Manger Square and the Grotto of the Nativity. They'll join with worship on the Sunday in St George's Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem.

The final three days will be in the north, visiting Nazareth, the Sea of Gallilee and Caesarea.

The bishop said: "As well as giving some excellent insights into Biblical scholarship, church history and contemporary life in the Holy Land, we trust the pilgrimage will prove to be a profound spiritual experience that enhances our ministerial formation."

Date set for next Diocesan Conference

CLERGY and lay leaders from our diocese are being invited to our next Diocesan Conference.

The three-day residential conference will take place at High Leigh Conference Centre in Hertfordshire from September 24-26. There will be a mix of speakers, worship and workshops as we work together to understand how God is calling our diocese forward.

To find out more about the practical details and the draft programme, see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/conference.