

A photograph of Gemma Hunt, a CBeebies presenter, dressed as a pirate. She is wearing a blue vest over a white shirt, orange pants, a yellow bandana, and a large silver belt buckle. She is smiling and pointing towards the camera. Behind her, a group of children, mostly girls in red shirts and pirate hats, are standing in a church setting. The background shows church pews and stained glass windows.

CBeebies presenter Gemma Hunt leads the pirate-themed services at St John's Church, Locks Heath

TV star leads second swashbuckling event

HUNDREDS of children enjoyed a swashbuckling pirate day at St John's Church, Locks Heath – with CBeebies presenter Gemma Hunt.

The church hosted two identical pirate-themed services on a Sunday afternoon which attracted around 300 adults and 300 children for games, songs and activities. And Gemma Hunt, who presented pirate quiz show *Swashbuckle* on CBeebies for nine years, was at the heart of it.

The church laid on colourful, pirate-themed activities in its grounds, including face-painting, balloon-modelling, bubble-generating and hook-a-ducking. Families arrived dressed in their own pirate-themed costumes.

They then went into the church where Gemma Hunt twice led an hour-long event that included the *Swashbuckle* theme tune, action songs, stories and games. She made a parent at each service walk the plank and she told the Bible story of the Parable of the Lost Coins using children as her props.

A choir, from St John the Baptist CofE Primary, Titchfield Common; St Anthony's RC Primary in Fareham; and Park Gate Primary were dressed in eye patches and pirate hats. They helped lead the songs alongside the worship band from the church.

Then in the evening, around 80 parents and some children returned for a 90-minute interview in which Gemma talked about her faith, her life in broadcasting, and some of the challenges she had faced in her life.

Mum Anna Ouwehand brought her children Ellie, aged 10, and Lucy, 4, to both the afternoon pirate party and the evening interview.

She said: "They loved it. They were excited about this day for quite a while, and whenever they see Gemma, it spurs them on. Ellie sat in the front row listening to every word in the evening. She loves performing and singing, so she'd probably like to follow in Gemma's footsteps."

And the vicar, the Rev Luiz Lima, said: "It was a fantastic day of joy and welcome, where hundreds

of children and families heard something about the love of Jesus and experienced an amazing welcome from St John's Church."

In the evening, questions had been submitted in advance from parents and children. Congregation member Paul Adamson hosted the evening, assisted by youth group members Otilie Chambert, 17, and Ben James, 15.

Gemma talked about her father leaving home when she was four, growing up in a predominantly white area, and finding faith at the church that her mother took them to. She went to the Christian festival Soul Survivor where God told her she would be 'salt and light' in the world, and that was important as she entered the world of children's TV programmes.

She also talked about the breakdown of a romantic relationship which had propelled her away from God, and how she needed Christian counselling to see where things had gone wrong. Read more on www.portsmouth.anglican.org/pirateparty