

A new era begins with Bishop Jonathan

ONE of many moments to treasure on the day Bishop Jonathan Frost was unveiled as our new bishop came as he stroked a baby goat outside St Mary's Church, Brading.

Bishop Jonathan and his wife Christine were both captivated by the goat held by volunteer Lucy Idle as it nuzzled into their hands. They also saw six-year-old Sam Chesters pluck a fresh egg from the chicken coop and tickle the tummies of pigs.

These young volunteers are learning about animals on the small farm run by the church as part of its commitment to caring for God's planet and sustainable living. It chimed in perfectly with Bishop Jonathan's desire for Christians to be at the forefront of seeking climate justice.

Bishop Jonathan and Christine spent the day touring our diocese on the day it was announced he'll be the tenth Bishop of Portsmouth.

He met worshippers and community leaders in our cathedral, at Newport Minster and at St Peter's, Petersfield. In all three places he was greeted with applause - and in all three he knelt to allow others to

pray for God's guidance in his new role.

He also made a point of calling in at the Roberts Centre in Landport and HMP Isle of Wight as part of his passion to tackle issues relating to poverty and justice.

'A bishop prays, shares the story of Jesus and speaks up for others'

Bishop Jonathan was initially unveiled as our new bishop at Charter Academy, our diocese's only mainland C of E secondary school. He joined pupils in a science experiment as Downing Street announced the news of his appointment - he was watching as students burned chemicals in a variety of colours.

Student Areen Saeed, 14, said: "It was one of the best days of my childhood life. It means a lot to us for the new bishop to be here, and he was asking us questions about the science experiment. I reassured

him that he is always welcome here, and he'll always have a special place in our hearts."

Next he called in on Carole Damper MBE, chief executive of the Roberts Centre, which supports vulnerable people across our diocese, to hear more about the specific issues that keep individuals and families in poverty. He committed himself to speak up on behalf of the marginalised.

At Portsmouth Cathedral he walked through the main west doors with the Dean, who then led midday prayers. Bishop Jonathan asked those who had gathered there to work alongside him as he tackled his priorities.

He said: "Some years ago, a child asked me what a bishop did, and what popped out may be relevant as I begin this journey with you. A bishop says her or his prayers, a bishop shares the story of Jesus and lives the story in daily life, and a bishop speaks up when there is injustice in our world, and is part of working with others to respond to it.

"I ask for your prayers, and I shall pray for you. It's the most important



Bishop Jonathan (top left) at Charter Academy; (top) on the farm at St Mary's Church, Brading, and (below) in our cathedral on his announcement day

relationship for us to nurture - to spend time with Jesus and allow the love of Christ so to fill us and inform us that we become a blessing to all those around us.

"As your bishop-designate, I want to be concerned about the big issues of the day. In the foreground of my thinking is the epidemic of poor mental health and wellbeing amongst our children and young people. We need to work in partnership with all kinds of agencies to seek their wellbeing.

"I want to be taking the next steps in climate justice. Our relationship with different parts of the Christian community across the world tell us that climate change is now

impacting the poorest and the most vulnerable communities on earth hardest, with deeply damaging consequences. Would you join me and others to seek the integrity of creation?

"And, seeing how Jesus moves among the poorest, will you join me in seeking the eradication of poverty? It's the Church's calling to raise up those who have fallen, to ensure that the ever-widening gap in inequality is reduced, and to ensure that every part of our society can participate fully in all the good things God has given."

The Lord Mayor of Portsmouth, Cllr Frank Jonas, was in our cathedral to officially re-open its lunch club,

which has started afresh after the pandemic in partnership with the Duke of Buckingham pub. Bishop Jonathan said grace for those who had gathered to eat.

His first stop on the Isle of Wight was at St Mary's, Brading. Over lockdown, it transformed its church hall into a shop selling local, organic, animal-friendly and Fairtrade items, and has turned a small meadow into a farm for goats, chickens, pigs and sheep.

Shop manager Aleksandra Morley said: "People appreciate our vegetables, which are local and freshly-picked. They might pop in for tea and cake, and to relax and chat, and then decide to buy some of our ethical products. We want to provide accessible opportunities to buy things that won't harm our planet."

Volunteer Lucy Idle, 14, is one of several young people learning about animal husbandry as part of the Level Land Farms project. She said: "I'm an animal person and I'd love to work with animals in some way. It's good to have a church where they really look after the environment."

Our bishop-designate then travelled to Newport Minster, where he met worshippers and community leaders over afternoon tea. Bishop Jonathan knelt with arms outstretched as the Ven Peter Leonard, Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight, and a group of clergy and lay people prayed for him.

And his final stop on the island was HMP Isle of Wight where he met deputy governor Theresa Orford and Steve Phillips, head of reducing reoffending, to discuss issues relating to the justice system.

Back on the mainland, he shared a glass of wine and Compline with worshippers at St Peter's Church, Petersfield. The new bishop warmly thanked all those who had travelled to meet him, and re-stated his priorities.