

Churches open up to help those in need

Worshippers are throwing open their doors to welcome those who may be struggling with rising prices or isolation this winter

CHURCHES across our diocese are stepping up to help those struggling financially this winter. They've thrown open their doors to offer food, company and warm spaces to those affected by the rising cost of living.

Families who are struggling with energy bills and people who live on their own can pop into their local church. They can stay warm, be given something to eat and be given some practical support.

In some, this involves inviting people to a coffee morning or café that already exists. In others, something new has been created to help those struggling with rising prices and mortgage costs. Often our churches are working in partnership with other community groups.

Christ Church, Sandown, is working with Sandown Town Council to provide a warm space for locals between 11am and 3pm on Mondays during the winter months. The church has opened weekly from October 31, with volunteers providing support and hot soup. Around a dozen people come each week.

The vicar, the Rev Mark Williams, said: "We recognise the rise in the cost of living, and the pressures on families and individuals, and are grateful for the support of the town council to provide a warm space for those that need it."



Visitors at Christ Church, Sandown, where they can enjoy drinks, soup and chat during this winter's cost of living crisis

And the town's Mayor, Paddy Lightfoot, said: "We have secured matched funding from the Isle of Wight Council, and thank the church for providing hot drinks, soup and socialisation for residents faced with rising energy bills and food costs."

Among other island churches offering warm hubs are **St Mary's, Carisbrooke**, and **Newport Minster**. St Mary's church hall is open from 10am-12noon on Mondays and Wednesdays, and Newport parish centre opens from 10am-12noon on Fridays. Free refreshments are available at both venues.

St Faith's Church in Havant launched its warm hub last month, providing home-made bread and soup, cakes and hot drinks inside the nearby Pallant Centre, just off North Street. It opened initially on Mondays from 12noon-2pm, with volunteers available to chat, free Wifi and charging points, and some games and books available.

Among those attending was Grainne Rason, who has recently retired from working in a local school. She said: "When you retire from work, you do lose those connections that you had in the staff room and so on. It's harder



Top: the warm space in the Pallant Centre, Havant, includes comfy sofas and armchairs; middle: Sandra Haggan, Shirley Copper and Grainne Rason in the Pallant; bottom: home-made bread and soup being served there

to make those connections with others, so it's good to have this available."

Centre manager Shelley Saunders said: "If you go into a coffee shop, it can be £3 or more for a coffee and people can't always afford that. We have a rota for making the soup, bread and cake, and

offer it all for free, with hot drinks. We even have comfortable sofas where you can settle down with a book."

There's also a space for people to donate surplus clean, good quality coats, hats, gloves and scarves. Those donations can then be made to anyone in the

community who needs winter clothing.

St Faith's is working alongside other churches in Havant, which are offering warm spaces on other days of the week. **St Alban's Church, West Leigh** is open on Tuesdays from 10.30am-1pm, St Joseph's RC Church in Havant is open on Thursdays at 6.30pm for a free meal. On a Friday, people can go to **St Nicholas Church, Bedhampton**, from 10.30am-12.30pm, while on a Saturday, Havant URC is open from 10.30am-1pm.

And **Hart Plain Church** is also opening its building for those affected by soaring energy bills and rising food costs. They've earmarked a Wednesday morning as a good time to welcome people. They have a group that meets in the church for a coffee morning anyway from 10am-12noon. There are hot drinks and activities for those who need a bit of company.

They launched their warm space in November, and are now offering some other activities such as table tennis and chess.

The deacon-in-charge, the Rev Kate Macfarlane, said: "For many people living in our communities, it's going to be tough winter. We know that in the area served by Hart Plain Church there are many people who are worried about how they and their wider families will cope.

"If we're heating our church building anyway – thanks to the generosity of those who worship here – then it doesn't matter if there are 10 people in the building or 100. So we're happy to fling open our doors to those in need. The best way for us to get through difficult times is to work together, and support those most in need. We saw how that worked during the pandemic, and I was