

Community cafe helps those who need food and company

heartened to see how people in this area pulled together”

They are working alongside Wecock Community Centre, which opened its doors as a warm space from 1.30pm-3.30pm each Wednesday, from the start of November.

St Michael’s and All Angels, Paulsgrove, is turning the church into a ‘Heat Hub’ every Monday and Friday through the winter, from 10am-4pm. It’s a free space, offering hot coffee, comfy seating, Wifi and board games in their Paulsgrove lounge. There’s also some after-school hot chocolate available.

The church is also hosting a project called Fishcake Friday, run by the community benefit group St M’s events. London-based chef Louis Coward, who previously launched a 10-week food project called Meatball Mondays during the pandemic, has created this as a follow-up project.

With help from the catering department of 12 Air Defence Regiment, based at Thorney Island, Louis and the team will make homemade fishcakes, box them up and give them away for free every Friday afternoon at the church until Christmas. All are welcome to pop in to collect some.

Among other churches open as warm spaces in Portsmouth are:

- **St Aidan’s in Anchorage Park** (weekdays, 9am-5pm);
- **St Cuthbert’s, Copnor** (weekdays, 9am-5pm, including a community cafe from 10am-1.30pm staffed by volunteers);
- **St Margaret’s Church, Southsea** (daily; community cafe open Thursday and Friday);
- **St Luke’s Church, Southsea** (Monday to Thursday, 9am-5pm);
- **St Jude’s Church, Southsea** (weekdays, 10am-12noon).

ST MATTHEW’S Church in Bridgemary is aiming to become the focal point of its community, by keeping the church open as often as possible.

The church has recently launched a community cafe inside its building. It’s called **St Matt’s on the Corner**, and is open from Mondays to Saturdays, from 8.30am-1.30pm. Hot drinks, cakes, breakfast and lunch are offered at reasonable prices.

The team have also launched a group called ‘Reignite’, which is aimed predominantly at the older members from across the parish but where anyone is welcome, and it gives them the chance to get involved in a variety of things to do or try.

They can knit, sew and create over a cuppa and cake, from 1.30pm-3pm on a Tuesday.

In November, they were creating Christmas cards, keepsake boxes and decorations in the run-up to Christmas. There are also games, magazines or just the time to sit and chat.

Cathy Juniper, who was part of a similar ‘Knit and Natter’ group before the pandemic,



Above: the ‘Reignite’ group meet in the St Matthew’s community cafe on a Tuesday afternoon; right: feeding families in St Matthew’s, Bridgemary

said: “We’re knitting stars for Christmas, as the theme is ‘Follow the Star’. I like to come here for the company, so I volunteer in the cafe and then this is my time to relax.”

The church also provides food for families who are hungry after school on Wednesdays, and runs its Muddy Church sessions on Saturdays, which gives children

breakfast and the chance to plant and tend vegetables.

Each of these activities attracts adults and children who might be struggling financially, might need a little extra help, or who might otherwise feel isolated.

And their doors are open for anyone who needs to find a warm space during these times because of rising energy bills – St Matthew’s is a



designated warm space.

Vicar the Rev Samantha Martell said: “We have a range of different things going on, but there is some crossover between the different groups. Because our church building is open throughout the week, it acts as a welcoming community centre for people who might never come to a Sunday service.

“We also have shelves of food

that we give away, and a selection of clothes for anyone who needs them. Plus, if we have more volunteers, we could open for even longer.”

There are plans to extend the church building, to provide more space for the community cafe and give it a higher profile as people walk past. For more details, see www.northgosportparish.org

The list of welcoming spaces in the city is being co-ordinated by Hive Portsmouth, on www.hiveportsmouth.org.uk.

Meanwhile, the annual Christmas voucher campaign run by Churches Homeless Action has now kicked off. You can buy gift vouchers for stores such as Boots, Argos, Sainsbury’s or others, pop them into a Christmas card and bring them to **St Mary’s Church**, Fratton, between 10am-12noon on a weekday.

They’ll be presented to local charities who work with needy families, survivors of domestic abuse and asylum seekers at a



Left: Fishcake Friday at St Michael and All Angels, Paulsgrove; above: chess is one of the activities on offer at Hart Plain Church on Wednesdays

carol service on December 16. The vouchers will allow individuals the dignity of buying a Christmas gift they’d like.

Our Head of Mission and Social Transformation, Canon Nick Ralph, has written to all parishes with suggestions of how they can help during this time of economic uncertainty.

He has indicated where to find resources from organisations such as Christians Against Poverty, Community Money Advice, and the Churches Mutual Credit Union.

You can find his advice at www.portsmouth.anglican.org/poverty.