

## How our churches' response to the pandemic unfolded:

### MARCH 2020:

The first lockdown begins. Churches are closed for public worship. Clergy broadcast services from their homes. Bishop Christopher launches a regular Sunday morning Eucharist live-streamed from Bishopsgrrove.



### APRIL 2020:

Volunteers from our churches feed the hungry and support those who are isolated, such as at Friday Fridge in St Jude's, Southsea (left). Thousands mark Easter by watching our digital services. The Isle of Wight is chosen as the place to pilot a new NHS app.



### JUNE 2020:

As Covid restrictions are lifted for the first time, churches are open for private prayer. Volunteers rope off pews and offer hand sanitiser to those spending time in quiet reflection (pictured left).



### JULY 2020:

Sunday services can begin again, with measures to keep people safe, including limited congregations, social distancing and face-coverings (pictured left). Some choose to come to church, others watch live-streams from home.

# We showed God's love to those in need

## The pandemic showed our churches at their best - adapting to new ways of worshipping, and caring for those who needed it

WHEN the spread of Covid led to our initial lockdown, the first thought of our churchgoers was how to help others.

Back in March 2020, they volunteered to help at Foodbanks, bought shopping for their neighbours, and rang those who were isolating to check they were OK. Worshippers were often at the heart of local community projects as well as action by churches.

Throughout the past 18 months, they've learnt how to use new technology to keep in touch, broadcast creative acts of worship from home and church, and kept feeding those who were hungry. They've moved heaven and earth to ensure weddings could go ahead at short notice, and comforted those who have been bereaved in incredibly difficult circumstances.

Our churches threw open their doors for visitors to pray privately

as soon as they could, and provided a steady diet of physical and digital worship, despite ever-changing Covid restrictions. It has been an amazing effort, which has not gone unnoticed. At times, our churches were among a small handful of places that remained open, cementing their role as the heartbeat of their neighbourhood.

**'One child gave us her pocket money to help us feed the hungry'**

Among the churches to remain open throughout the pandemic was **St Margaret's Community Church in Southsea**. It had launched a 'community cupboard' in 2019 where people could donate food and supplies that could be handed out to others. As soon as the first lockdown started, they were

overwhelmed by donations, and they remained open three mornings a week as a Foodbank, supporting hundreds of people.

More recently, they have refurbished their building to create a permanent café offering hot drinks and snacks and a soft play area, all at reasonable prices. They are open alongside a community shop, selling clothes, furniture and ornaments to those who need them.

The Friday Fridge, based at **St Jude's Church, Southsea**, had previously provided a café and chat for the marginalised and vulnerable on three Fridays nights a month. Once the first lockdown started, they switched to being open every single Friday, offering food and drinks for people to take away from 9pm onwards.

Over the past 18 months, they estimate they've given out more than 2,000 packages of food, often supplied by supermarkets



Above: some of the Easter eggs and gardening equipment donated to those in need during Lent 2021; top right: the Foodbank at St Margaret's Church, Southsea; bottom right: Evie Watson and the gift boxes Leesland Junior School donated to care homes



as it was approaching its best-before date, and guest numbers have been running at twice the normal rate.

Leader Jim Campbell said: "The food supply has been amazing, from an increase in surplus from supermarkets to excellent sharing across the city by various groups offering food.

"We've also seen a significant upturn in donations to this project as well, including random £50 anonymous donations, and a wonderful donation of £7.04 by one child who wanted to give us her pocket money. We, and our guests, are truly being blessed by

the amazing generosity in this city."

It was a child's initiative that sparked a creative project in Gosport. Eleven-year-old Evie Watson inspired families from **Leesland C of E Junior School** to show kindness to those living in nearby care homes, showering them with Christmas gifts.

Evie recruited staff, pupils and parents from across the school community to donate items. They collected more than 600 festive donations and packed them in boxes wrapped in Christmas paper, to give to elderly residents in a Covid-secure way.

Associate headteacher Anne Wake said: "Evie has driven this project forward from the start. She created a Powerpoint which was played to every class in the school as part of their collective worship, designed a flyer and has given a lot of her own time to decorate and organise the boxes with help from her friends.

"We thought we might get two or three boxes, but we were inundated with wonderful gifts from so many of our families. The local