

Drive aims to create more young disciples

Growing Faith aims to change our culture by prompting families, churches and schools to work together to disciple a generation

THE children enthusiastically take off shoes and socks and plunge their feet into bowls of water. These pupils from Swanmore C of E Primary School are learning how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, as they learn how to be disciples too.

As they carefully clean and dry each other's feet, they're learning an important lesson about serving others. They are part of Worship Wonders, a church-led lunchtime club running at the school which brings together 30 or more pupils to pray, worship and discover more about faith.

A team from **St Barnabas Church, Swanmore** lead Worship Wonders every Thursday. It was set up in partnership with Ellie Cousins, the schools worker from Southampton City Mission, and has met in the classroom of Tricia Clark, the school's RE lead, every Thursday since May 2021.

It's just one example of the kind of initiative we'd love to see as part of 'Growing Faith' – the national Church of England movement that aims for churches, schools and families to work together to help to create young disciples.

Jill Phipps, who is the lay minister at St Barnabas, said: "We've always had a good relationship with the school, which is only across the road from the church. Ellie used to be the RE lead at the school herself, and she asked if we'd be interested in



Lay minister Jill Phipps with Worship Wonders at Swanmore C of E Primary School; (right): pupils wash each other's feet; (far right): parents and children at the Cygnets toddler group in St Barnabas Church, Swanmore

getting involved in starting a 'Grow Community' to walk alongside the children as they grow in faith.

'There are moments of stillness, awe and wonder when the Spirit is palpable'

"The school have 12 children involved in their Worship Council, and they initially helped to lead and plan the half-hour sessions. It's designed not to be like school or Sunday School and the children give us suggestions about what they'd like to learn about and do.

"We start by lighting a candle and

saying an action prayer. We might tell a story from the Bible in an interactive way, and have some craft or other activity to confirm what they are learning. It is a happy and busy time but there are also moments of stillness, awe and wonder when the presence of the Holy Spirit is palpable, and some thoughtful and insightful reflections and prayers from the children.

"The children who come are from year R to year 4, and we have had more than 40 attending. We link it to our monthly Cafe Church at St Barnabas, which two or three of the families involved do attend."

The church also launched the Cygnets baby and toddler group

Church nave is packed with toddlers

WALK into St Jude's Church, Southsea, on a Wednesday morning, and it will be full of babies, toddlers and their parents.

Craft activities, toys, puzzles and games are scattered through the nave, tea and coffee are being served to parents – and later on they'll all gather for songs and stories. This is Little Tiddlers, which attracts dozens of families each week.

It was launched after the pandemic, from 10am-11.30am each Wednesday in term-time, and is run by children's ministry enabler Bethan Fogell and volunteers. It's a great way of linking church and families, which echoes Growing Faith.

Bethan said: "It's fantastic to see the church transformed into a space that looks so attractive for the under-fives each week, and that so many families come along.



Bethan Fogell leading Little Tiddlers at St Jude's Church, Southsea

"We have some amazing volunteers who develop relationships with these families. Many of them have had children themselves, and so can offer advice and support to anyone struggling.

"We also have an opportunity to share something of God's love with them through our songs and stories, and by inviting families to other church activities where they'll hear more about faith."

Historically, the church has had

a major involvement with pre-school children through St Jude's Church Nursery, which is based in Silver Street and is part of the church's mission to Southsea. Church members also lead collective worship at St Jude's C of E Primary School.

And the church also encourages dads to take their children camping in the New Forest for a weekend each year. The annual 'Bears Camp' happens each June. Find out more on www.sjs.church.



last year, which allows young families to meet every Monday morning. There was little else happening in the village for this age group before, and it's also proved popular. Toys, games, books and craft activities are available, plus coffee and cake for parents and snacks for the children. The sessions end with songs in a circle.

Vicky Goldsmith, who brings along Millie, aged 2, and Benji, 1, said: "We moved into Swanmore at the beginning of the pandemic. It's been fantastic to get to know other

local families and to make friends with parents and children. My husband's in the army, so it's good to have support while he's away. And we were able to get them both baptised here last September."

Al Stuart, who brings Rory, aged 1, along, said: "We moved here in April 2022, so it's great for him to meet other children to play with. He has two brothers at the school, and he's calm when we are here. It meant I came to the Christmas service."

Many of our parishes already have

these kind of good links between their congregations and schools, with teams leading regular collective worship. Many also have good links between congregations and local families, via toddler groups, Messy Church and family fun days.

The national Church's Growing Faith movement aims to put children, families and young people instinctively at the heart of the mission and ministry of the Church, by changing its culture. And our diocese is now part of one of 12