

behind the scenes said: "I love being able to help out and seeing everyone enjoying themselves. We use different puppets each time, depending on the Bible story that we are telling."

She and other members of the Bedhampton team have visited Ascension Church in Balham in order to learn how Bubble Church works.

The rector, the Rev Max Cross, said: "In Bedhampton parish, we made a commitment to put children, young people and families at the top of all that we do. Bubble Church is a natural next step for many who we have connections with us through other programmes, festivals and our schools work."

'Bubble Church is short, snappy and just right for our children'

"We've been overjoyed with the success of Bubble Church and now see it as a key part of our regular services. It's not another children's group, it is a service and that is what has made the difference."

"When the families go home they have worshipped, made a confession, thanked God for his provision and opened up the Bible. It has been wonderful to see families come to faith and move on in their relationship with Jesus. In Bedhampton parish, Bubble Church is here to stay."

The service takes place at St Nicholas Church, Belmont Grove, in Bedhampton, on the third Sunday of each month. It starts at 9.30am, but families are encouraged to get there 15 minutes early to share breakfast and coffee together.

More details are available on: www.bedhampton.church/bubble

Gosport church hosts fun-filled service with puppets and praise

THEY'VE just celebrated a year of fun, food and puppets at Bubble Church in Bridgemary.

On two Sundays each month, St Matthew's Church is transformed into a place where babies, toddlers and their parents can enjoy singing, prayer and Bible stories that are aimed at its youngest worshippers.

There is breakfast available in their cafe space from 9am, then families place themselves on their bubbles in the nave. Excited children cheer and shout as the puppets appear from behind a black screen to lead the singing and to tell the stories.

The church's children, youth and families minister Steven Smart guides families through a confession, where they say sorry for those things that have made Jesus sad. There's also a time for children to come forward and say 'thank you' to God, as well as an activity in their 'bubble bag'.

On this occasion, there's a chance to make Christingles as they think about Jesus being the light of the world.

Eliza Young, who brings her three-year-old daughter Delilah, said: "We've been coming since it started, and it feels like being part of a family. Everyone is welcome and Delilah feels at home."

"The puppets really encourage them to be interactive, and help them to concentrate. I used to come to the cafe, the Christmas fair and the toddler group on a Friday. This is a really good introduction to church for her."

And Matthew Mullender, who brings his three-year-old daughter Rosie, said: "I've always been a Christian myself and I wanted to encourage my daughter in faith as



well. I was looking for a church that would cater for young children, and I'm happy to travel to this one.

"She loves the puppets and seeing everyone, as she has made friends here. And it gives Rosie her first real insights into God and Jesus, which is really important."

For the congregation at St Matthew's, it's another way of serving the local community, in addition to the Muddy Church, community cafe, family meal times, and Messy Church that they already provide.

Steven said: "Pretty much all the families that come to Bubble Church are those that didn't come to church previously. It's great to have something to offer families with the very smallest children."

"It's just half an hour, but it includes all the elements we might want to see in worship. It is just in simpler language and an accessible format."

"We're also hoping to redevelop our building, starting initially with

Top and right: children sing at St Matthew's Church, Bridgemary; above left: making Christingles; below: breakfast in the cafe

the porch and welcome area, but ultimately including expanding our cafe, to make it an even bigger centre for those living in this community.

"We celebrated a year of Bubble Church with a special service in February, which included cake. It does feel as though there is a specific community of families that now know each other by coming to Bubble Church."

When a church signs up to become



a Bubble Church, they are provided with branded videos and Powerpoint displays that help organisers to lead such a service.

They are also encouraged to buy a selection of puppets that are used to help to tell the stories, and given training in how to operate them.

See www.bubblechurch.org for more details.



Heather Powney

New officer to support this ministry

WHEN it comes to advising our parishes about this kind of work with families, we now have a diocesan employee who can help.

Bishop Jonathan appointed Heather Powney to be our diocese's new Children, Youth and Families Officer from the start of February. She has had six years of experience of a church youth worker, and was working at Emsworth Baptist Church until last year.

She also co-ordinated the High Tide youth service, which involves monthly events and annual holidays for 11 to 18-year-olds from church youth groups in the Portsmouth area.

Our vision as a diocese is to double the number of children and young disciples in our churches and to ensure that every household has access to a thriving ministry for children, young people, and families. Heather's appointment is a key step in our rejuvenate strategy.

She said: "I have a passion to see young people come to Jesus, and keen to see churches, schools and households working together to help children, young people and families have life in all its fullness."

Contact her on heather.powney@portsmouth.anglican.org