

## IN DEPTH: CHURCH DRAMA

The Brighstone Barnacles folk group will double up as the disciples. Pilate, who is also helping to direct the performance, is a National Trust warden and Caiaphas is a teacher at the school.

Local firms have been generous with their help. Builders JR Buckett are providing the cross; Coast and Country are supplying a marquee; and Isle of Wight Pearl and AJ Wells are sponsoring the performance. Teams of local people will also offer refreshments afterwards.

Another church also hopes that the words of the gospel writers will prompt non-churchgoers to think about the Christian faith. **St Jude's Church in Southsea** will host 'The Mark Drama' at the start of April.

Fifteen actors will re-enact scenes throughout the gospel of Mark as part of this 90-minute production. They'll perform in modern dress, and 'in the round', with audience members on all sides. The audience will be encouraged to take part during crowd scenes.

The curate, the Rev Adam Denley, said: "I saw this staged at theological college and it was very powerful. We rarely get to experience a whole gospel from start to finish.

"The majority of the script is actually the words of the Bible, and so people are able to engage with this first-century document in a unique way. To be part of a crowd where actors are stood near you shouting 'Crucify him' is captivating and really brings Mark's gospel to life."

Worshippers are invited to bring their friends to performances on Saturday 6 April at 7.30pm or Sunday 7 April at 10.30am – though it's recommended that people don't bring children aged



(Top): Performances of 'The Mark Drama' happen in everyday clothes and in the round; (below): Diane Mills and her daughter Emily, 13, get into costume to prepare for performances of the Brighstone Passion Play this Easter

under eight. More details are on [www.themarkdrama.com](http://www.themarkdrama.com)

Re-enacting scenes from Jesus's life is just one way in which drama can help to build up our faith, or help to evangelise others. Southsea-based Top Cat Theatre Company has been performing Christian plays and sketches for 23 years, including adaptations of 'The Screwtape Letters' and 'Pilgrim's Progress'.

Members are currently acting as 12-year-old children coping with the pressures of school, church and friends in their ongoing soap opera 'Southsea-enders'. The final episode will be staged during Funday Sunday at St Jude's Church at 10.30am on March 24.



And drama is often used by teams who regularly lead school assemblies to help explain what the Bible says.

'Open The Book' resources are used by teams from **St John's Church, Fareham**, and **St Paul's Church, Sarisbury Green**. They tell the stories using simple language, role play and props to make the stories accessible. Volunteers from St John's Church help the pupils in their local schools to act out the Bible stories themselves.

Professional storyteller Bob Hartman will lead a session at St Paul's Church, Bursledon, on March 9, to find out more about Open the Book – and whether you can use it in your church.

## IN DEPTH: CHURCH DRAMA

### Pantomimes help build up community

IN many churches, performing drama isn't just about the show itself.

It can also be about creating a sense of community and achievement for those who perform.

That was certainly the case for the cast of **Aladdin**, which was performed in January at St Wilfrid's Church, Cowplain.

It was the second year in a row that a group had staged a pantomime there, and their motivation definitely included the joy of working together.

Many of the group were part of an Alpha Course that was running during 2017. They wanted to keep on meeting, and wondered what to do next.

They came up with the idea of a pantomime and pulled together an improvised version of Cinderella within three weeks in early 2018. They repeated the idea, with an enlarged cast, in 2019.

Their version of **Aladdin** featured adults and children acting and singing, complete with a pantomime dame and magic tricks.

Director Natalie Pettit said: "We wanted to keep that seat-of-the-pants feeling from last year, but have slightly more rehearsal, so we met in



Some of the cast of **Aladdin**, performing at St Wilfrid's Church, Cowplain

November, had two rehearsals before Christmas and one dress rehearsal."

The cast publicised their two performances in the local school and via social media.

The cast of the annual pantomime staged by the parish of St Mary's in Fratton, also value the idea of community and fun. Their performances will be on March 2, at 2.30pm and 7pm at St Wilfrid's Church, George Street, Fratton.

The vicar, Canon Bob White – who often plays the pantomime dame – said: "It is a bit of fun,

but there is also a serious side of inter-generational working together. It builds up the community of faith and deepens relationships – there are some fascinating and profound conversations backstage.

"It is also about breaking down barriers with the wider community, engaging with them in a way which helps to overcome the 'barrier' of the Church as being seen or perceived to be remote.

"There's a real sense of 'carnival', with those in leadership being prepared to laugh at themselves as well."

### Four top tips for staging drama

**1. PURPOSE:** Are you doing it just to have fun – or to make a spiritual point? The greater the impact you'd like to have, the more you'll need to rehearse.

**2. SCRIPT:** It is possible to write your own, but it's hard. Others have already written great plays and sketches with Christian themes, so do research

what's out there.

**3. CAST:** You may be tempted to share the burden by recruiting lots of actors, but large casts can be difficult to manage.

**4. LINES:** You will come across so much better, however long or short your drama, if you have learnt your lines.

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