

Children from Horndean C of E Primary School prepare for their Flourish worshipping community

New congregations to renew the Church

We'll create new worshipping communities as part of our diocesan vision and strategy - including 'Flourish' in schools

IMAGINE a scenario where children are worshipping God in a style they've chosen themselves – and in a place they visit every weekday.

That's the vision behind Flourish, a new Church of England initiative that aims to create worshipping communities within schools. Pupils choose to meet together at lunchtimes or after school for a session of songs, craft, activities and teaching that they've helped to shape.

This will now happen in four schools in our diocese from September, as we help to pilot Flourish worshipping communities. Churches and schools will work together to help pupils to find out more about the Christian faith and worship God. Bishop Jonathan launched the initiative across the Church of England in July and ours is one of 12 dioceses involved.

The four schools in our diocese that

will host such groups are Bembridge C of E Primary, the Bay C of E School in Sandown – primary and secondary sites – and Horndean C of E Junior, each supported by their local parish. Although these happen to be church schools, the concept is not limited to C of E schools.

These new Flourish groups are just some of the new worshipping communities that we aim to create as part of our diocesan vision and strategy. The **RENEW** part of that strategy includes the creation of church plants, as we aim to create congregations in brand new areas.

It also echoes our aim to **REJUVENATE** our churches, finding ways in which children, young people and families can find a sense of belonging and purpose, and lowering the age profile of our congregations overall.

One of the principles behind Flourish worshipping communities

is that they will be created and shaped with the pupils themselves at the heart of the decision-making. Each one may be different, depending on the school's context and geography and the input of the children themselves.

Isaac Haskell, deputy headteacher at Horndean C of E Junior, said: "We're excited to take part in the Flourish project. We're particularly looking forward to the opportunities during and after school for our wider school community to come together and learn more about Jesus. We're excited that the children will be the driving force within that, and that they can have a huge part in planning and creating the ideas, so that they're at the centre of it."

And Horndean pupil Maisy Baldrey, 11, said: "I'm already part of the Children's Christian Values Team, and get to help the school to improve its Christian life and to

make it fun. I think Flourish will be good because it will create an after-school club and church for children and parents."

Many of those in dioceses, parishes and schools involved in this two-year pilot came to the national launch at St John's Church, Waterloo, in July to discover more about what would be involved.

Bishop Jonathan, who is also the C of E's lead bishop for education, said: "We are beginning to shape one of the most important cultural shifts in the Church of England's history. Children and young people are the Church of today, not the Church of tomorrow. And putting them instinctively at the heart of our Church, and at the heart of our strategy, our prayer, our worship – every aspect of our ministry, is a real turning point for our Church and for our nation.

"I've noticed that the team running Flourish tend to choose possibilities over barriers, change over stasis, courage over fear, wisdom over naïveté, challenge over anything over-simplified, growth over decline, the team over the individual, and a 'yes' over a 'no'. This is a moment for us to do the same, and to say yes to the Holy Spirit. We want to change our nation through our children and young people."

The launch of Flourish in our schools, from this September, is part of our diocese's vision and strategy, which was agreed by Diocesan Synod in June. We're aiming to be a Church with Jesus Christ at the heart of everything we do, in which we seek God's Kingdom, and where all are enabled to experience a life-transforming encounter to become disciples.

All our parishes, schools and chaplaincies are therefore invited to take part in a strategy that we pray will guide us towards this vision, led by the Holy Spirit. It aims to tackle some of the challenges we know



Pupils prepare to take part in brand new Flourish worshipping communities in (top): Bembridge C of E Primary School; (middle): the Bay C of E School primary site and (bottom): the Bay C of E School secondary site