

Decorated chairs to celebrate our heroes

MORE than 1,000 pupils celebrated everyday heroes by bringing their decorated chairs to our cathedral.

The Year 6 pupils from 29 different C of E schools in south-east Hampshire and the Isle of Wight came to one of three separate Leavers' Services to mark the end of their time in primary school. And each school brought with them a chair decorated by pupils, designed to be a seat for someone who is a hero in everyday life.

'We are all heroes in God's eyes and there are many everyday heroes'

Among the chairs brought to the cathedral were those decorated in memory of ordinary soldiers who died in the First World War, those that celebrated people working in the caring professions, and those that reflected the Christian values of their school.

Before each service there was a morning of workshops that explored the theme of heroes in more detail. Children learnt how to signal using naval flags, reflecting the heroic deeds of Admiral Lord Nelson. They went on a trail around the cathedral which linked heroes of the past with those of the present. And they designed a coat of arms to represent the character traits of heroes.

Ruby Philp, 11, from Newtown C of



Top: pupils from St George's C of E Primary School in Portsea try naval signalling; below: Horndean C of E Junior School pupils try heraldry

E Primary School in Gosport, said: "I enjoyed making our shield, with bright colours and symbols on it to represent our school. I didn't know what to think about coming to the cathedral, but it's been more fun than I thought it would be."

And Louis Bingham, 11, from St Jude's C of E Primary School in Portsmouth, said: "It has been

really good. I've enjoyed it. The trail helped us to find out about everyday heroes, and it was good to do the signing with the flags."

The Leavers Service itself included the chance for some children to dress up as everyday heroes, and to hear about the disciple Peter, an ordinary fisherman who Jesus used to launch his Church. Bishop



Christopher spoke at one of the three services, with clergy colleagues leading the other two. Pupils were also invited to explain the thinking behind the decoration of their chairs.

Each school was presented with a special candle to light when prayers are said in school over the next year, and each child was given a wristband to remind them that they are all heroes in the eyes of God.

The children's chairs were left in the cathedral for two weeks to allow visitors to see the pupils' creativity. The chairs were then returned to the schools to be used over the next 12 months in lessons and acts of worship when everyday heroes are celebrated.

Similar services were also held in Winchester Cathedral. In all, 160 C of E schools across Hampshire,



parts of Dorset and the Isle of Wight were invited to bring their chairs to one of the two cathedrals.

Jeff Williams, our director of education, said: "Last year we asked schools to transform life-size fibreglass sheep in our Ewe Matter project. The feedback from children was good, as they loved decorating them.

"We thought we'd try something this year that reflected the fact that a hero isn't just the traditional concept of a caped



Top left: the bishop asks pupils to raise their arms so he can bless their wristbands; above: the bishop presents candles to pupils from each school; left: some of the decorated chairs

crusader with superhuman strength. In fact, we are all heroes on God's eyes, and there are many everyday heroes, such as community volunteers, lunchtime supervisors, and emergency service personnel, who make daily practical expressions of their faith and commitment to serving the Common Good for the flourishing of all.

"The children were invited to decorate the chairs fit for an everyday hero. We hope that once the chairs return to the schools, they can be used in worship to celebrate heroes in the schools themselves – for instance, a child or member of the local community who has demonstrated the school's Christian values."