



We're devising new ways to worship

New congregations are springing up around our diocese, aiming to reach those we don't always serve well

AS the first families step through the door, they're met with the lip-smacking smell of honey-glazed chicken being cooked.

The tiniest children start playing with toys on the playmat, while their brothers and sisters colour in pictures, and their parents grab a coffee. In a few moments, they'll all sit down for a hearty cooked meal.

Pioneer minister the Rev Tim Watson then invites them to think about the emotional and spiritual baggage that weighs them down, as he stuffs symbolic items into a real suitcase. Then everyone is given the chance to write down on a luggage label the issues they'd like God to deal with. Children and adults then tie the labels to a wooden cross in the church.

This is **Leesland Neighbourhood Church**, a brand new congregation that meets at 4.30pm on Sundays in St Faith's Church. It's the first new worshipping community that Tim has created in the area as part of his pioneering brief.

'Food is amazing and it also brings the community together'

A small team launched the congregation in February at the tiny mission church in Tribe Road, Gosport. Around 20 or 25 people get together each Sunday afternoon for an hour or so.

It's designed to appeal to those who might not normally go to church, and the usual format

is coffee and chat, followed by a shared meal to build up relationships. Then they'll be a brief talk or presentation or a shared activity with a spiritual theme.

It's one of several brand new congregations to be launched in the past couple of years across our diocese. Creating new worshipping communities to reach those who we haven't always served well is a key part of our diocese's **live | pray | serve** strategy.

"About half of the people who come have never been to church before, or haven't been to church for years," said Tim. "Some of them have links with Leesland schools, or they have family members who attend church, or they just live locally.

"Hopefully what we can offer is something that builds up the local community and gives them a chance to think about spiritual issues. We also want to join in with what local people are already doing to help build up the community of Leesland."

Becky Knight, who attends with her seven-year-old daughter Eve, said: "I'm actually Roman Catholic, and Eve used to go to church every Sunday morning. But Sunday afternoon is actually more convenient.

"I'm not that churchy, but it's good for Eve to hear about what Easter is and so on, and it's good for us to be involved with something in the local community. It's also nice to eat with other people."

Holly and Daniel Rands brought their four children along for the first time to the Easter egg hunt on Easter Sunday – and then came back in subsequent weeks. "Someone who lives in our street invited us along, and it's handy because it's around the corner," said Holly. "The food is amazing, it's good because the kids can play together and it also brings the community together."

Tim Watson is one of three pioneer ministers appointed by our diocese to help create brand new worshipping communities, using innovative ways for people to engage with God. For more information, see www.leesland.co.uk.

Our other two pioneer minister posts are in Cosham and Leigh Park. Pioneer minister Nicky Pybus has also started a new congregation in St Philip's Church, Cosham, to serve families. **Lego Church** meets at 11am on



The Rev Dom Clarke at the home of the Beacon - the Phoenix Theatre in Bordon



Families enjoying the creativity on offer at Lego Church in St Philip's, Cosham

the third Sunday of each month, replacing the regular Sunday morning service. Families are encouraged to use Lego bricks to help tell Bible stories and work out a Christian response to them.

The service builds on the work of the after-school Lego club that Nicky has been running at the nearby Highbury Primary School.

Portsmouth has already seen a brand new congregation launched in **St Margaret's Church** hall in Eastney. A handful of worshippers from St Jude's,

Southsea, started praying and worshipping there midweek and launched Sunday services a year ago. Now around 70 attend each week.

Nearby in Milton, there are plans for a new congregation to be launched via the creation of a children's choir (see overleaf). And also in the city, Harbour Church has launched a new service for families on Sunday afternoons in Copnor (also overleaf).

At the northern tip of our diocese, the Rev Dom Clarke and other