

So many ways in which we can pray

Our 10 days of prayer as part of Thy Kingdom Come helped us to appreciate different ways to pray. But there are even more.

THERE can't be many times in our diocese's history when thousands of Christians have prayed simultaneously in one outdoor location.

But that was the case when we hosted the **Big Prayer Picnic** in the grounds of the historic Portchester Castle. It was the climax of the global Thy Kingdom Come initiative in our region, marking the end of 10 days of prayer for local people to come to know Jesus.

The initiative – which was launched by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York – now involves people praying in 65 denominations in 114 countries around the world.

And our three-hour Pentecost Sunday event was a mix of creative prayer, family-friendly games and sharing a picnic,

followed by worship and prayer led from the main stage. It came at the end of 10 days of ecumenical prayer in churches, church halls and people's homes across this region.

Worshippers placed rugs on the grass, set up chairs and opened up their hampers to enjoy an open-air Sunday lunch. Children queued up for a mechanical rodeo bull, played crazy golf, had their faces painted, and took part in jousting. Families also joined together in teams to play games organised by Spirit in Sport.

Worshippers also interacted with around 20 gazebos, each offering prayer in a different style. They were able to draw pictures of those they were praying for onto stones, reflect on icons with incense being burnt nearby, be anointed for healing, weave threads together to reflect

prayers being joined together, and try out monastic chanting.

Experienced Christians were on hand to guide worshippers through prayer styles they might not have been familiar with. And for some it was a real voyage of exploration as they engaged with God in very different ways.

Then the 90-minute worship and prayer time began with a word from Bishop Christopher, and music led by a contemporary worship band. They led the 2,000-strong crowd in praising God using traditional hymns and contemporary songs, with the words flashed onto a big screen.

A video message was played from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and three relatively new Christians were interviewed – each with the local churchgoer who had helped lead them to faith.

Hosts the Rev Andrew Hargreaves, our mission development officer, and Katherine Message then led worshippers in a variety of ways of corporate prayer.

Worshippers faced big banners emblazoned with the names of different parts of our diocese and each prayed their 'best one-minute prayer' for each place simultaneously. They got together in groups of three, four or six at different points to pray for topics chosen by a random generator on the big screen.

There were some formal responsive prayers, a time of silence when worshippers were invited to kneel in God's presence, and the chance to pray the Lord's Prayer in British Sign Language. The afternoon ended with a rousing version of *Thine Be The Glory*. Worshippers were commissioned to take the good news of Jesus and share it back in the places they had come from.

Worshipper Emily Best, from St John's Church, Rowlands Castle, had brought her daughters Sophie, five and Alice, three. She said: "We are loving it. It's so nice to see lots of families having fun outside. There are lots of activities, and they were desperate to do the face-painting first. But they have painted some stones and will probably take them home to put on their window sill."

The Rev Steve Sutcliffe, curate at Gurnard and Northwood on the Isle of Wight, said: "Coming together as God's family always brings me so much joy – seeing old friends and making new ones. To be able to come out of your parish, bring a picnic, relax, worship and pray together is fantastic.

"The part I enjoyed most was the 60-second prayers for each location, because I could imagine each place, think about what is



Top: Thy Kingdom Come has introduced a method of praying for five friends to become Christians - with five knots in a leather strap around your wrist; bottom: children such as Alice and Sophie Best - with their mum Emily - were among those able to take part in a variety of creative ways to pray at the Big Prayer Picnic

going on there and pray for those things."

standing around us."

And mum-of-three Marianne Matthews, from King's Church in Portsmouth, said: "It's great to be with 30 or so people from our congregation and also to be with our wider church family. It has been lovely for the children to have space to run around and play football while it has all been going on. I really liked getting together in small groups to pray with those who happened to be

The Big Prayer Picnic was the final event in our series of Thy Kingdom Come ecumenical prayer events across the region. Christians gathered together everywhere from urban Portsmouth to rural Hampshire villages, praying in all kinds of different styles in the 10 days between Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday. You can see more photos from the day on www.portsmouth.anglican.org/thykingdom.