

'Dad's army' just the job for church

IT'S only taken 814 years, but one Isle of Wight church is finally connected to the mains sewer!

The new toilet, with disabled access, is just one aspect of a major re-ordering at St Mary's Church in Brighthstone which was completed last month.

The main work has been the installation of a new, underfloor heating system which meant a new floor was laid across the entire church.

The floor level has been raised by six inches, making the entire church level throughout and offering greater flexibility in its use.

The most remarkable thing about the work is that most of it has been done by volunteers. College lecturer and qualified plumber Iain Johnstone devoted the entire summer break to the project and was supported by a 'dad's army' of helpers.

Volunteer builders, decorators and electricians spent several weeks wheeling barrels of cement into the church, adapting the pews and adding finishing touches.

An army of enthusiastic volunteers cleaned the church each Saturday, meaning that there were only four Sundays when services had to be held in the village hall.

The vicar of St Mary's, the Rev Tim Eady, said: "The result



(top): Volunteers Rob Snow and Ivor Debney at work in St Mary's Church; (bottom): Peter Williams does the tiling

is that we have achieved, for less than £50,000, a result which would easily have cost more than £150,000 if a building firm had been engaged, and all to an amazingly high standard.

"A new, limestone floor was laid in October, and the final result is stunning."

The new floor will be dedicated at a special service on December 10.

Help give them a happier Christmas

OUR annual appeal to help give disadvantaged people a brighter Christmas was launched this year by a bishop and a theatre company.

Bishop David Walker, chair of the newly-formed group Housing Justice, was at St Mary's Church, Fratton, on October 30 alongside Solent People's Theatre.

The theatre group presented a play with a difference – the audience was encouraged to watch real-life stories being portrayed, but stop the action and change it to try to create a happier ending.

They were publicising the start of the homeless vouchers scheme, which encourages worshippers to buy gift vouchers for rough sleepers, poor families, women in refuges and asylum seekers to buy the Christmas presents they really want.

The scheme is run by Churches' Homeless Action, an ecumenical group that tries to

keep such issues on the churches' agenda. Last year £8,000-worth of gift vouchers were donated via agencies such as Portsmouth's Women's Refuge, the EC Roberts Centre in Landport and the Haslar Visitors' Group.

Christians and others are invited to buy their gift vouchers from shops such as Tesco, Argos and Boots and slip them inside a Christmas card that they can sign. These may be the only Christmas presents that some homeless or disadvantaged people receive.

Anyone who would like to take part is encouraged to bring their signed cards and vouchers to their parish churches, or to send them directly to Canon Bob White, St Mary's Vicarage, Fratton Road, Fratton, Portsmouth, PO1 5PA.

The vouchers will be handed over to the agencies involved at a special service at St Mary's Church at noon on December 17.

NEW ONLINE SHOWCASE!



Photographer: David Lindsey

Learn more about Christian faith

EVER wanted to know a bit more detail about the Christian faith, but were afraid to ask? Have you completed the Kairos programme and would like to go into some issues more deeply?

The bishop's foundation course is one way you can learn more, and - after a break during 2004 - it is returning in the New Year.

This is a 24-session course which tackles issues including the authority of the Bible, church

history, the thinking behind baptism, the Eucharist and the creed, and an introduction to all three persons of the Trinity.

There are also several sessions on the Bible itself, looking at Old Testament history, the prophets, the gospels and St Paul.

It starts on January 10, at Greatham church hall, Greatham, near Petersfield. The course continues on Wednesday evenings over two terms until summer

2005.

There is also one weekend residential session, and a session on the Passover that includes a Passover meal. There is also one piece of work to be done - a 1,000-word essay which will not be graded.

The cost of the course is £20 per term (not including the weekend). If you are interested, please contact Liz Hodson on 023-9282 2053 or education.liz@portsmouth.anglican.org



ALL NEW FREE SHOWCASE WEBSITE FOR UK ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS