

Pupils learn of God's rainbow promise



Martin Willetts, 11, and Elizabeth Brown, 10, act out Noah's story.

As the sheet drops to the floor to reveal Noah's ark, there's a hushed "Aaah!"

The children from Sarisbury C of E Junior School have recognised which Bible story the 'Open the Book' team is going to tell this week. The team, from St Paul's Church in Sarisbury Green are using giant props and puppets to tell the story of the flood – entitled 'A Special Promise'.

They lead assemblies there each week in term-time, working their way through the Bible and Christian themes, using stories from *The Lion Storyteller Bible* and other sources. The St Paul's congregation makes and supplies props and costumes for the assemblies, and a prayer group prays specifically for the project.

Before each assembly, the team recruits children to help tell

the story. For the assembly about Noah, 10 and 11-year-olds help bring the story to life by making sound effects, adding props at the right time and using puppets for Noah and his family. And all 300 pupils join in, shouting out how many days it rained for.

There's a big cheer from the children as a paper dove is waved over the ark, showing that Noah, his family and all the animals are safe. And a huge rainbow banner is unrolled above the ark to signify the special promise God made to his people.

The Rev Sandy Matheson, vicar of St Paul's, says God's special promise still applies today. He explains: "God loves each one of us, and cares for his world. Every time you see a rainbow, remember God's promise."

One of the recruits, Megan McCann, 10, said: "I like it because they make it quite interesting. The stories help you learn

about God."

The Open the Book team, which also includes Jan Farrow and Mike Cooper, started leading assemblies four years ago after hearing about the idea at a children's ministry conference. It had been developed by Churches Together in Bedford.

Some team members also lead assemblies at Sarisbury Infant School every two or three weeks. Other worshippers in Titchfield and Portchester are now doing the same in local schools.

Team co-ordinator Penny Cooper said: "We'd like to encourage others to take this idea into their local schools and churches. We'd be pleased to offer help and suggestions. If there's enough interest, perhaps we could set up a workshop."

For more information about the work of the Open the Book team, contact Penny on 01489 584227.



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Inspiration from Poland

RECENTLY, I went to Poland for a long weekend with Ben Mizen, our diocese's youth and children's work adviser.

We were guests of the Lutheran Church and they particularly wanted us to experience their annual youth assembly taking place in Skocow. This is a small town in the south of the country, near the Czech border.

We went exhausted, having stepped out of a busy period of work in the diocese, and so made the journey a bit reluctantly. What we experienced that weekend, however, was utterly amazing and so uplifting.

We stayed at the Lutheran Centre for Mission and Evangelism (aptly 'CME'). This was a real beehive of activity.

From here was co-ordinated the national church's children and youth work, their national evangelism week and holiday clubs throughout the land. Here were based their radio station broadcasting each night to five million people, a Bible School embracing both resi-

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by the Ven Trevor Reader
Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight



dential and non residential courses, and from here the national Youth Assembly was organised.

The gathering of the church's youth was amazing: 850 teenagers had taken over the town square in Skocow. Gospel choirs and rock bands led worship from 10am to 10pm.

Locals hung out of their windows so that they didn't miss the event, whilst passers-by stopped to join in. Alongside were numerous workshops and opportunities to rekindle friendships.

We may have arrived tired but we were uplifted. This was contagious stuff and we wanted more. We couldn't help but reflect on life back home.

Why is it that too many folk in our churches seem to be walking around with their heads to the ground, in a sort of maintenance or survival mode?

The contrast we experienced in Skocow was of a confident people with heads lifted high, looking for new horizons, eager for fresh ideas. Then I thought: "Thank God for Kairos, which is encouraging us to do just that" and "Thank God for our central structures review which is encouraging us to refocus on mission."

Ben and I returned with a real zeal to do God's work, with our heads lifted high, and with renewed confidence. As the Psalmist said 'I lift up my head to the hills...'

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