

Church seals role at heart of community



Families enjoy the bouncy castle outside St John's on the open day held by the church and The Park Centre

IT'S a church that is now firmly at the heart of its local community.

Novice computer users rub shoulders with amateur artists, while keen poets and digital camera enthusiasts pop in for classes. Dozens of people are now using the new Park Centre in St John's Church in Ryde.

The church is hosting this thriving community centre, which offers courses, an internet café of eight PCs and a real café each weekday.

It was part of the church's Kairos plan to offer space to an existing community project that helped local residents with advice, training and a drop-in centre. Working in partnership with Ryde East Community Association - which runs The Park Centre -



meant the project received Kairos pump-priming money and a £170,000 lottery grant.

The official launch of the centre came at an open day at the end of April. Representatives from local schools, churches, community organisations and councillors were invited to see the new premises, and residents were encouraged to sign up for courses as children played on a bouncy castle outside.

During May, courses in computing, poetry, art, keep-fit and digital imaging courses were started. There are now also plans for a keep-fit class for a more mature group, a sewing and dressmaking course and carnival workshops to help both adults and children prepare for Ryde

Carnival. Plans have also been drawn up to convert the old vestry in the church into a games room, complete with a pool table, which can also be used as office space or a meeting room. It will be dedicated by the Ven Peter Hancock on June 4.

Project manager Barry Kemp said: "We had 40 or so people signing up for our new courses, most of whom weren't involved in our previous location. Being in St John's means more of the local community can use our facilities. There's also a very different atmosphere being inside a church, and more space.

"We're delighted that so many of the community are making use of it. We also hope to work alongside schools soon to help them provide breakfast clubs or after-school clubs before and after the school day.

For more information about the centre, ring 01983-611913.

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Making sense of it all

I'VE just spent an hour or so at St Hubert's Church, Idsworth. As I stood there in such amazing tranquillity, I realised how much I'd got used to the background noise of Portsmouth since moving back from the Isle of Wight. It made me appreciate not only the sense of hearing but also the gift of peace.

The five senses of hearing, tasting, touching, smelling and seeing are quite amazing, aren't they? I'm reminded of the Psalmist thanking God "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

Ears may look stupid on the sides of our heads, but just think of the middle ear with such fine sounding bones as the hammer, anvil and stirrup, and the inner ear with the cochlea so intricately and delicately made that fires all those signals to the brain and enables us to discern the most amazing range and quality of sounds.

Yes, we are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made. Thank God for the five senses and let us always remember those who for whatever reason do not have one or more of those senses.

Sticking with just one of them, the sense of sight, isn't it amazing that we so often neglect



the **last word**

by the Ven Trevor Reader
Archdeacon of Portsdown

opportunities to look more closely at things? We can briskly walk down the street and not see the cat in the tree, or who is passing by on the other side.


We need to train ourselves afresh to look more closely at God's creation, be it an insect on a rose or a hint of sadness in someone's eyes. If you want to rekindle that ability and desire to really see what's around you, then read Annie Dillard's book *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek*. It's utterly amazing.

Having led some meditations recently in three of our parishes, which we called 'Making Sense of Holy Week', I'm really fired up on this one. We explored the sounds, sights, touches, smells and tastes of Holy Week as a means of reflecting and making sense of it

all. I'm now more and more convinced that we don't make enough of stimulating the senses in our worship.

The Eucharist of course has it all - be it the smell of incense; the taste of bread and wine; the sounds of beautiful words, music and bells; the sights of the altar, elements and gestures; and, of course, the sense of touch when we receive those precious elements and when we share the peace. Yes, participation in the Eucharist is truly a sensuous experience. Maybe those of us who prepare worship need to constantly seek ways of stimulating each of these fine senses.

Anyway, next time you look in the mirror, open your eyes and just thank God that you are 'fearfully and wonderfully made.



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