

Pioneer is new top cleric on the island



Canon Caroline Baston

THE next Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight will be one of the first women ordained as a priest.

Canon Caroline Baston, who is currently a rector in Winchester and the diocesan director of ordinands, will take up her new position at the start of September.

She takes over from the Ven Trevor Reader, who became Archdeacon of Portsdown on the mainland in February.

Caroline will be installed in Portsmouth Cathedral at 6pm on September 10 and welcomed to the island at St Thomas's Church

in Newport later that week after starting work at the beginning of the month.

The 49-year-old used to work as a teacher in a Birmingham inner-city comprehensive before training to become a priest. She initially worked as a curate in Southampton and was among the first tranche of women to be ordained to the priesthood in 1994.

She was appointed rector of All Saints Church, Winchester, with St Andrew's Church, Chilcomb, and St Peter's Church, Chesil, in 1995.

For the past 11 years, she has combined the post with a diocesan

job. She worked first as diocesan communications officer, with responsibilities that included media liaison, and since 1999 as diocesan director of ordinands, which involved helping those interested in becoming clergy themselves.

She said: "I am delighted to accept Bishop Kenneth's invitation to become the next Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight. It is an exciting and challenging post with both island and diocesan responsibilities.

"I very much look forward to moving to the Isle of Wight, getting to know the clergy and people of the parishes and working

with all sections of the island community."

Bishop Kenneth said: "I'm delighted to be able to appoint someone with Caroline's experience and skills to this job. I'm sure she will bring a lot to the Isle of Wight community, and to the Portsmouth diocese as a whole."

She enjoys both playing and watching sport, and is interested in spirituality, including how to use traditional insights and wisdom in a contemporary culture.

She is also a school governor of her local primary school, and a member of both Amnesty International and Medicin Sans Frontiers.

Bill for church repairs unveiled

REPAIRS to the listed churches in Petersfield deanery will cost almost £900,000 over the next five years, a survey has shown.

English Heritage surveyed all 17 listed Anglican churches in the deanery as part of their 'Inspired' campaign, which aims to persuade the government to contribute more to the maintenance of church buildings.

It was one of five sample areas across the country they looked at in order to calculate the current repair bill for churches across the country.

The survey involved looking at quinquennial inspection reports, a questionnaire sent to churchwardens and a visit by a consultant architect. He calculated the repair bill for the Petersfield deanery at £860,000 from now until 2011.

The national repair bill was estimated as £925m over the next five years, or £185m each year. Although churchgoers are valiantly raising around £67m a year, that still leaves a £118m annual shortfall.

The five-point plan to tackle the problem outlined in the 'Inspire' campaign includes a reform of heritage protection legislation, new support officers to advise congregations how to look after their buildings more effectively, and new maintenance grants schemes.

Rural dean the Rev Simon Weeden said: "It's difficult to know whether that's a fair figure or not, but it does identify that our historic buildings are a great expense, whether you are a small rural community or a large urban church. We'd certainly support any campaign to encourage the government to help with the funding of church repairs."

The Church of England is responsible for 80 per cent of all listed places of worship in England. Of the £101m it spent on repairs in 2004, around £40m came from grants and £60m from worshippers.

With other denominations, that means England's congregations are heroically raising £67m, or 60 per cent of the total spent on repairs to listed churches. But many essential repairs are being overlooked because not enough help is coming from the government and the wider community.

Ex-teacher helps teenagers examine faith

SUE Ganter is used to helping Portsmouth teenagers explore religion and spirituality. Now she's taking it to a different level.

The former religious studies teacher has taken on a new role as co-ordinator of Portsmouth Youth Inter Faith Forum (PYIFF). The half-time post has been funded by the Home Office until at least next March.

She is working with the forum – a group of 13 to 18-year-olds from different faiths – to help celebrate diversity and promote dialogue between youngsters about religion and spirituality.

That will include teenagers visiting different places of worship, raising awareness about faith issues and creating links with existing multicultural events.

Sue, who was head of religious studies at Springfield School in Drayton for 14 years,



Sue Ganter

said: "I enjoyed what young people had to say and the questions they asked when I was teaching. But that might only be for an hour a week in the classroom. This job gives the young people involved a chance to go deeper.

"The forum is a place where they can ask each other awkward questions about faith in a safe environment. It may also strengthen their own faith as others ask questions about it. It's about valuing the diversity that we have.

"I want to involve people who have no faith as well. I think that's important as, although young people are interested in spirituality, most would say they don't relate to a particular faith.

"The young people also want to engage beyond the mainstream, with some of those smaller faith groups or those in more deprived areas that are harder to reach.

"From my work with young people in the city, I know there are problems in terms of

FORUM MEMBERS SPEAK:

"It gives me a wider understanding of the interfaith groups within the city. It also helps me understand my place within the culture of the city."

Sarah Jamieson, 18, from St Mary's Church, Fratton (Church of England)

"We need to learn how to appreciate the cultures and people who are all around us."

Shirin Hosseini-Sech, 15 (the Bahai faith)

racism and lack of understanding, as elsewhere. Schools can only address so much in RE and citizenship lessons."

The forum was launched in 2005 by Portsmouth's Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), which advises on the city's RE syllabus. The forum organised a multicultural music and interfaith day for 200 people last December.

Sue and the city's interfaith co-ordinator, Taki Jaffer, will be based in our new diocesan offices in Peninsular House from August 7.

Because of work and exam commitments, some members have left the forum. Sue is looking for representatives from the Sikh, Sunni Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and atheist communities. Anyone interested can contact her on 023-9282 1137 (before July 31), 07900-661868 or pyiff@freenet.co.uk