

Life and faith in rural Britain...

COUNTRYWAY



Celebrating Christmas Chaos!

My name is Sallie and I'm a retired primary school teacher and a lay preacher in our parish, part of a rural community on the west side of the Isle of Wight. Back in November 2019, Revd Leisa Potter, our vicar, asked me to organise the Crib Service held in my church, All Saints, on Christmas Eve. Being a retired teacher, this was not a daunting exercise for me as I had organised many school nativity plays.

Leisa and I decided we would do a 'scratch' nativity, pulling the play together on the day with whoever turned up to get involved. We put an advert in the church magazine inviting everyone to come along in costume or everyday clothes. Additional costumes were provided by our Open the Book group, and we recruited adults willing to take responsibility for specific groups of characters – Marys, sheep, angels etc. – and help them to their correct place at the correct time.

The plan was for a traditional retelling of the Nativity with fun actions and a mixture of well-known carols and fun songs. Leisa was the narrator and I acted as director, making sure everyone was in the right place at the right time.

Christmas Eve arrived. The church was ready – furniture moved, pianist in position, tubs of chocolate by the door to give to everyone as they left – and we waited.

As time ticked by, we accumulated a Mary and a wise man (my grandchildren) and lots of adult leaders but where was everyone else? 4pm was fast approaching... and then suddenly the church was full!

Yes, at some points it did seem like bedlam! Stage fright amongst some of the younger children meant we thought we'd lose a few characters, but then a group of visiting teenagers stepped up to the mark and were brilliant! A lovely little toddler thought that the straw shouldn't stay in the manger but be scattered all around the church. The only donkey we had really didn't want to take part, and the shepherd's crook managed to pull the mains lead from the piano in the middle of a song!

But none of this mattered because our church was alive, full of people of every age having fun and embracing the true message of Christmas.

Everyone went home happily munching their chocolates, ready to embrace the busy days that were to follow.

And the straw all over the floor? Well, luckily my grandson loves hoovering so that was easily remedied, and everyone helped to put the furniture back ready for Midnight Mass. It had been a truly uplifting experience!

Sallie Boulter

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