

PEACEFUL PLACE TO PRAY

A PRAYER garden created in memory of a former school governor has been officially opened. The ceremony was the culmination of a week of preparation involving all the children at St Mary the Virgin School in Hartfield.

As part of the Year of Prayer in the diocese, Rev Julie Sear, Rector at Hartfield and Coleman's Hatch, led a collective worship with the pupils ahead of the official opening of the garden, which is in memory of governor Marion Jackson.

Rev Julie and Parish Children's and Families' worker Katrina Thomas looked at Psalm 139 and thought about why Jesus asks us to pray. The children from age four through to 11, discussed why they pray and what prayer means to them before working on their own art projects.

St Mary's School then held a "pause day" with the whole school considering prayer and what it means in their lives. They made prayer flags, prayer wishes for the year ahead and wrote prayers in decorated jars. The jars were filled with their prayers and solar candles placed on top. They also wrote prayers on CDs to hang in the garden and in the willow reflection den.

One pupil, Roma, aged eight, said: "I loved it because it was so creative and fun to do and we wrote some special prayers." The prayers were placed in areas of reflection in the school, including the garden itself.

The opening was performed by Rev Julie and Mrs Jackson's widower Tim. All the children gathered for the ceremony and joined in prayers to give thanks to God for the school and community.

Rev Julie said: "Many of the children have been encouraged to visit this space, in particular the beautiful heart stone placed at the centre which is being used as a garden of remembrance. "They can remember loved ones or go when they are feeling sad. The children can add a coloured stone around the heart and remember someone they miss or want to pray for.

"As part of the prayer space, a newly planted willow structure was named, after a vote by the children, as the 'Reflection Den'. More of the wishes and prayers were added so this can be used as a quiet space to reflect during play times."

Hilary Rowberry, a current school governor who is also responsible for running the wildlife explorers' club, planted flowers in the garden for the children to enjoy.

Acting Headteacher Frances Taylor said: "By pausing on the curriculum to consider aspects of life as a church school has given all of us the time to reflect and pray. It has been truly meaningful for our children who are looking forward to using the prayer garden throughout the year."