

Stevenage school gets creative for the Year of Mercy

Stevenage, Hertfordshire: A buzz of excitement spread across St Margaret Clitherow RC Primary School in Stevenage earlier this month as the first school pilgrims walked through their newly blessed Holy Door, dedicated to the Year of Mercy.

Since 8th December, pupils and staff at this one form entry primary school have been busy designing and preparing ten special panels to

surround doors at the entrance to the main hall. The panels were designed after exploring what Mercy means to them and depict a range of symbols including those related to Reconciliation, Eucharist, revelation, celebration, love and community. They are vibrantly decorated and encourage individuals walking through them to consider 'Who am I and how can I show the face of

Christ to others?' Pupils and staff worked together to paint the large-scale images and were excited to see the project some together.

The doors are surrounded by ever-green foliage upon which hang prayers and commitments for the year of Mercy from families and others associated with the school.

"It was fantastic to walk through our special Holy Doors and feel that

we had worked together to make a gateway to something very special" commented one KS2 pupil. "I felt like an angel on a journey" commented another, "these doors are very holy!"

Representatives from the Year 6 Chaplaincy Team worked with a teacher to research the essential

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A powerful start to the Year of Mercy

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elements of the Roman Rite of the opening of a Holy Door, before composing their own service. The whole school community gathered outside of the doors in the Reception Outdoor Learning Zone, on a windy afternoon, whilst pupils blessed each panel. Following some thoughtful prayers and a reflection on what the year ahead meant for all, pupils proudly followed the Gospel into the school hall through the Holy Doors as all sang St Bernadette's *Alleluia*.

Finley (Yr 6 pupil): "After walking through these doors you will come out a new and better person. They are unique and special; throughout the year they will help us in our actions and spiritually."

Sophia (Yr 6 Pupil): "The Year of Mercy is a time to start over, a new leaf. During this year we try to forgive and use our 'heart that sees' to help people in need. It's like making a promise to Jesus telling him that we will be more like him through our actions and words."

Having listened to the Gospel, hearing of lost and found sheep, the whole community left through the Holy Doors, going out into the world ready to show the face of God and His mercy to all whom they meet.

The doors are a new entrance to a special multi purpose space used each week for assemblies. This year the pupils will take a different route to assembly, entering the sacred space through their own Holy door, a pilgrimage which will lead them to the Word of God and enable them to go out into the world ready to be the hands, feet and face of Christ in the world.

Headteacher, Jon White, commented, "this has been such a powerful start to the Year of Mercy. The children understand very well what it means to be a 'heart that sees' and are ready to meet their neighbour with mercy and compassion. We pray that families walk with us through the door of Mercy this year and see how the Church's door is left wide open. Each of us can pass through and be renewed; each of us can bring others with us on this journey. The invitation to the door is wide open and our children are ready to respond!"

The school plans to use the opportunities of the Year of Mercy to full advantage. Children will continue to receive the opportunity to partake in the sacrament of reconciliation this year and we hope to use the children's enthusiasm as a gateway for more adults to access the sacrament. There will also be



an opportunity for children to share their understanding of mercy in an open morning during early February and an evening parent and parishioner session is planned to explore a theme of mercy in the home. Practical projects are already underway and focus in particular on supporting refugees and the homeless in positive actions and prayers.

Deputy headteacher, Carmela Puccio, added, "I am so proud of our children; they know the needs of their neighbour both locally and globally and are desperate to act now – our future is in good hands!"

