



attracted more than 100 people and revived interest in a rural church.

St Mary the Virgin, Fawley, launched the Friday prayer group in the first week of lockdown in March 2020.

Led by a local congregant, Julia Ogilvy, the group has seen around 50 people regularly attend in the churchyard with more than 100 people joining at Christmas.

Julia explained: “The usual congregation for our fortnightly Sunday service is around eight people whereas we have at least 50 regulars who like to attend Friday prayers whenever they can.”

The informal nature of the outdoor setting also helped congregants feel safer during the pandemic.

Julia said: “By standing in our churchyard we feel we are at the centre of our community.

“Our prayers always include a list of first names of people in need of prayer – often running to 30 or more people known in the village.

“We tend to stand in a circle for no more than 15 minutes with one person leading the prayers – with the theme ranging from friendship, home, living with uncertainty and welcoming strangers.

“We typically include poetry and a Bible reading that fits our theme, the Lord’s Prayer and general prayers that are written specifically for that week.”

The prayer group has been a success outside of the church as well.

The increased use of the churchyard helped spur members of the local community to set up a group called Friends of Fawley Church.

Julia added: “We have a renewed sense that the churchyard is a shared space for the benefit of the whole village.”