

God and sailing are both vital in my life

FOR some people, sailing is just a hobby. For Emma Youngs, it's integral to her Christian faith.

Not only did she find faith via a regular sailing holiday, but she also volunteers for a Christian charity that helps disadvantaged young people learn to sail.

The low-key approach of the Morning Star Trust involves building relationships with young people to raise their confidence and being available to share the Christian faith if asked.

And Emma, 20, from St John's Church, Rowlands Castle, has just won this year's International Tall Ships Race with a crew of young people with little experience. Their boat beat more than 100 others from 37 countries in the first leg of the race.

"I used to go on Christian sailing holidays as a teenager with others aged between 13 and 18," she said. "It was an annual thing in East Anglia called the Walrus Cruise. I discovered that I really enjoyed sailing. It's great to get on board with a bunch of complete strangers, have to work as a team and go through a challenging experience where you learn something new.

"I had come from a Christian home and Christian family but it had never felt particularly real to me. It was these sailing holidays, being with people my age, having a fab time outside, and also studying the Bible every morning and evening, that made it real. When I was 16, I remember having a moment when I thought 'This is real, and I need to do something about it'.

"I was baptised and grew a bit bolder in my faith. I also met the person who built the Morning Star boat and then found myself at university in Kent, living very close to where the Morning Star



A Morning Star crew of Christian volunteers and young people

is moored in Chatham. I started out doing scraping and painting as part of the winter re-fit, but then started going on their trips. I ended up taking a year off from university to fit in all the sailing!"

The Morning Star Trust works with other organisations to offer a life-changing experience to young offenders, people going through drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes, pupils who have had problems at school and other groups. Typically, a skipper and two mates will sail with a dozen

inexperienced young people who will act as the crew.

The trust owns three boats, but its original 62ft gaff ketch, the Morning Star of Revelation, is usually used. It sails almost constantly from March to November, taking around 420 people a year and sailing around 5,000 miles per annum. Trips can vary between one-day trips along the coast, to five or seven-day trips to Holland or France.

"It's great for these young people to come away from their normal lives for a few days on a boat and learn new things," said Emma. "They might have to overcome sea-sickness, or learn to work as a team. Their confidence might increase as they realise they can do things.

"One group had all been expelled and so were thought of as problem children. They were with us for five days and it was hard work. But the more you spoke to them, the more you realised how unstable their home lives had been. The way they behaved was a way of

insulating themselves."

"We came ashore and had a walk and one of them said he had been on a trip with Morning Star the previous year and it had changed his life – he'd been on track to drop out of school as soon as he could, with no plans for his future. But since his trip last year he had begun to work hard at school for his GCSEs and now aspires to go to college and take A-levels. His teacher was on the trip too, and confirmed his attendance and grades had gone up massively since the previous year. It was his confidence in himself that had changed."

The International Tall Ships Race is a yearly celebration for

Emma. "There is a Thought for the Day each day, and they can ask us about our faith, as well as us posing questions about what life's all about, what they want to achieve and so on.

"When we were crossing the finishing line in the Tall Ships Race, one of the crew was asking 'What made you become a Christian?' and a couple of us were sharing our testimonies. And someone told us that the highlight of the trip was not winning the race, but having the chance to think seriously about faith."

Emma's parents had run the Crusaders in Rowlands Castle and attended a church in Portsmouth. But when she was 14, she switched

my faith

Sailing has been a big part of Emma Youngs' life. She became more serious about her faith because of a sailing holiday and now helps others find faith via a Christian sailing charity

young people from across the world, many of whom have never sailed before. It involves crew games and parties as well as races. The first leg of the race last summer was from Aarhus to Helsinki, and involved ships ranging from Russian naval vessels to Mexican square riggers. Fifty per cent of each crew have to be between 15 and 25 years old.

Emma was a mate working alongside her skipper and 12-strong crew of young people for five weeks as they raced over 800 nautical miles, battling Baltic storms.

"Part of our mission is the fact that we are all Christians," said

to the local church, St John's, and became part of its youth group. It was there she was baptised, and her parents are still part of the church.

She started studying Biomedical Science at the University of Kent, and took a year out after her first year to devote more time to the Morning Star Trust. She is now in her second year, which means sailing has to fit into holidays and weekends.

She's also engaged to be married, and will tie the knot with Alex Coakley at St John's, Rowlands Castle, next June. Inevitably, she met him while they were both sailing.



The Morning Star at anchor

You could join the crew

THE Morning Star Trust doesn't just give disadvantaged young people the chance to sail. It could also give the same opportunity to you.

Church groups or groups of friends are able to crew the Morning Star or its sister ship Dayspring for a day, a weekend or trips of five to seven nights.

The Trust will provide experienced sailors to be skipper and two mates,

leaving 11 places for your group.

You would sail from their base in Chatham along the east or south coast, or across to Holland, Denmark or other European destinations.

You can also donate to the work the Trust does with young people, and also pray for the staff and volunteers who help them.

To find out more, see www.morningstar.org.uk or ring 01634-403890.