

Matt Lockwood, Lexi Stares and Kathryn England lead worship at Holy Rood Church in Stubbington



Talented musicians help us worship God

Worship groups in churches across the diocese use a variety of musical styles to help our congregations engage spiritually

WALK into many of our churches on a Sunday and you'll see microphones, guitars, keyboards and a drum kit near the front.

Worship groups composed of talented musicians and vocalists use them to help our congregations engage with God – leading them in lively praise and contemplative worship. The musical style can be anything from folk to hard rock.

Such groups have been a part of church life for several decades, developing alongside a network of contemporary songwriters and popular Christian festivals.

It's tempting to make a big distinction between traditional hymns – often led by organs and choirs – and more modern songs, but many of our churches actually feature both. Sometimes both styles feature in the same service, sometimes they are separate.

Matt Lockwood is worship pastor

for **Crofton parish**, and also leads a network of worship leaders called 631 – based on Psalm 63:1 – who meet to share expertise.

He said: "It can be easy to think of worship as just something you turn up to and sing along with, but there's more – seen and unseen – that's going on. We partake in something bigger than ourselves in worship, greater than our own preferences or opinions.

'Worship transcends time, language, location, even personal theology'

"There's an agreement and co-operation, not just physically where we are gathered, but spiritually with heavenly worship and praise. Worship transcends time, language, location, even personal theology.

"As a worship leader I look to use songs that connect not only with our congregation but also our wider community – it's important there is authenticity in how we worship, and the songs we use reflect that in language and style. In fact, all that we do as a worship team is built around helping people worship."

Pauline Gennings came from Holy Rood, Stubbington, to help create a more informal Sunday morning service at **St Mary's, Portchester**. The 11.30am service – called the 'Later Service' – began as a monthly event in 2018 and became weekly in 2019. Worship is led by a band playing keyboard, guitars and drums, alongside amplified singers.

"It has been so exciting to be part of something new, such as putting together a service and a worship band from scratch," she said. "We appealed for people to join in and about 14 or 15 people turned up. We started monthly, but realised that it was difficult to retain people

if we only met once a month.

"We rehearse on a Wednesday evening, and are still gradually introducing new songs. A couple of us can actually lead the group, so we take it in turns. We can, of course, still play more traditional hymns as a worship band, but we might play them in a different way.

"It's gone down very well, and the service has grown. We were attracting younger families to this service, so we moved our children's work from the more traditional service to this one. But it's not just younger people who come. And because we're in the middle of Portchester Castle, sometimes tourists who are visiting will hear us and look in!

"There is a certain amount of crossover between the 9.30am Eucharist and the 11.30am Later Service congregations. I'm certainly very happy there, knowing I'm in the right place."

There are also two Sunday services at **St John's Church, Locks Heath**, where the 9.30am Common Worship service with organ and choir is followed by an 11am Informal Service with a worship band. There are similar numbers at each. A few attend both, and there are some joint services.

Worship leader Paul Barrow said: "We used to have a service – called The Happening – in the church hall at the same time as the 9.30am service, but the only way to expand it was to meet in the church itself. The worship band tends to include guitars, keyboards and drums – whoever happens to be around.

"We don't have enough people to have more than one band, but our musicians are a range of ages, and all are experienced. There are four worship leaders, so the workload is shared out.

"We think it is important for the musicians to rehearse, and we tailor our songs to the theme of the readings and sermon on the Sunday. The 11am service is the one that our



Top: Justin, Emma and Ashby Capps lead worship outside St Mary's, Portchester; middle: (l to r) Rachael Munn, Richard Hawkins and Michael Hastings play at St John's, Locks Heath (photo: Laura Scottorn); bottom: (l to r) Jude Harvey, Tom Rees, and Liz and Andrew Day, who lead worship at St Paul's, Barton

children and families tend to come to, and we do have the occasional hymn and songs with a younger focus. We do like to introduce new songs, although a recent survey suggested we were doing too

many! It is important to get the balance right.

"And when we do joint services for Harvest, Remembrance and so on, which might involve both