

Musicians collaborate well together

THE musicians leading worship at St James' Church, Emsworth, have played with each other for so long that their bond is almost telepathic.

One glance at each other is all it takes for them to know they are repeating a chorus, adding vocal or instrumental harmonies or opting for a flute descant to the worship song they are playing. It's what happens when accomplished musicians have worked together for 15 years or so.

Members of the group play at the monthly Family Service in St James' Church, and the fortnightly Breakfast Church in the church hall. They often blend vocals, keyboard, guitar, bass, flute and percussion into a sound that is more orchestral than rock band.

The worship band is led by music teacher Sarah Pinnell, who can play piano, saxophone, clarinet and flute. She also plays the organ and leads the choirs at the parish's more traditional services at St James' and St Thomas à Becket, Warblington, so oversees a plethora of worship styles.

With the growth of Breakfast Church, which is held at the same time as Holy Communion, Sarah has passed over leadership of the band at those services to Adrian Lincoln and Chris George, who have a wealth of experience from leading worship bands in their previous parishes.

Sarah has just celebrated 25 years since she originally joined the choir at St James', and is approaching 23 years as director of music in the parish.

"I do love it, and our worship band is really special," she said. "We are a very tight group of musicians and we all know what we're doing. We've played for so many years together and we gel really well."

"We do demand a certain standard of musicianship – at least grade 4 or 5. We don't practise other than for 45 minutes before each service. If we're learning a



The worship group at St James Church, Emsworth

new song, either Adrian or I will send out the arrangements and maybe a YouTube link beforehand, so each musician turns up knowing what to do. We're really lucky to have a group of such talented people and we derive a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction from playing together and serving our church in this way."

"We find it really important to get the right speed for each song – too slow and it will come across as turgid; too fast and it will lose depth and meaning. We don't have drums, so it needs to be driven by the keyboard or the rhythm guitar. We also need to pitch it right, so that the top notes aren't too high or the bottom notes too low for the congregation."

"Personally, I find it easier to engage with God when I'm leading the choirs and singing, but with the band, there are many worship songs that really inspire me. When the congregation are singing well, the hairs on the back of my neck will stand up. There are a few songs that I'm not so keen on, but I recognise that they do help other people to worship God."

"If I'm playing the piano, which is close to the congregation, there may be people near me who are raising their hands in worship, and it does feel special that they are engaging with God. It's a real privilege to be helping them."

The parish's range of worship styles includes 1662 Prayer Book services with hymns played on the organ at Warblington Church; Common Worship with well-known hymns and some worship songs in the morning at St James; and action songs and choruses with families at Breakfast Church and at the Family Service.

Congregation members tend to opt for the service that features the style of worship they prefer.

Members of the St James worship group also play at the 6am Easter Sunday service on the foreshore, in Emsworth Square for an open air Harvest Service and for the switching on of the Christmas lights, and they tour pubs in the village to lead Christmas carols.

Sarah is also hoping to organise Praise Evenings once a quarter, which would focus only on more contemporary worship.