

(Left to right): Jill Fothergill, Hazel Peach, Elizabeth Marsden, Paddie Collyer, Sven Tester, Angela Adams and Mandy Metcalfe outside St Lawrence Old Church

Worshippers trained in parish ministry

Meet some of the lay people we're training to lead worship, preach and offer pastoral support in our parishes

ATTEND a church service on the southern tip of the Isle of Wight and you may find worship is led by someone without a dog collar.

That's not because they don't have a vicar – the Rev Rob Marsh actually started work there earlier this year. It's because several lay people from the congregations have been trained to lead worship, preach and offer pastoral care.

They now have the skills not just to keep worship going, but to offer an alternative perspective in sermons or different worship styles to local clergy. Local worshippers love the variety – and the fact that it is fellow villagers who are drawing them closer to God.

Their experience is just one of the ways in which local lay ministry is being developed across our diocese. It often involves lay people enrolling onto short courses to become a Lay Preacher, Lay Worship Leader or Lay



Lay worship leaders, lay pastoral assistants and lay preachers from the Isle of Wight at their commissioning service in St Mark's Church, Wootton

Pastoral Assistant, and then being commissioned in special services.

Mandy Metcalfe, from **Niton**, who is both a Lay Worship Leader and Lay Pastoral Assistant, said: "We were already taking Communion to people in their homes, but without any real training. When Nigel Porter was our vicar, he developed

these courses for lay people and suggested that we went on them. I went on every course that was going!

"Becoming a Reader can take three years, so I'm grateful that the diocese has broken up lay ministry into some smaller, bite-sized pieces, which means you can go on a

Trained to lead worship

SPECIFIC training in leading worship has made a big difference for Claire Rennie.

She had spent 13 years at a church in London where she became increasingly involved in her worship group. She played the trumpet, viola and guitar, helped organise which musicians would be involved in each service, and led an Exploring Worship group for children and young people.

When she moved to the Isle of Wight in 2016 and joined All Saints Church, Gurnard, she started playing in its monthly all-age services. She also started organising regular practices and offering encouragement to the musicians of various ages.

Then in June 2019, she took part in a six-week course to become a Lay Worship Leader. The six modules included input from experienced tutors and the chance to compare notes with participants from other parishes. Those who completed the course were then commissioned for future ministry.

When Covid struck, Claire was involved in helping worshippers to meet online. But since then, and since her parish became vacant

in 2023, she's led monthly all-age services, Taizé-style meals and worship, Celtic Morning Prayer, and Café Church, among others. In addition she's also led Communion services at which members of a clergy team have then presided.

"The course certainly helped to equip me for the role, as it looked at certain basic principles of worship, and pointed me in the direction of some resources," she said. "I think I'm able to lead a broader range of worship and think more expansively about it."

Her experiences prompted her to also enrol on the Lay Preachers' course in Autumn 2023 – another six-week course which involved learning how to deliver a sermon and watching videos of themselves preaching. Claire now preaches a couple of times each term at either All Saints, Gurnard and St John's Northwood.

She also happens to be a maths teacher at Christ the King College in Newport and serves as joint chaplain there, alongside Stuart Brenchley. That involves organising weekly worship in the school's newly-commissioned chapel, organising its three worship groups, and supervising its



Claire Rennie with her trumpet

fundraising for Christian charities.

"In all of these roles, I'm really happy to be part of a team that helps people to worship," she said. "I hope the school chaplain role allows me to be a bridge for pupils between the school and the parish, and I hope we can empower the next generation of worship leaders."

specific course and contribute in that way.

"I remember leading the Remembrance Day service in 2022, and I was terrified of getting it wrong. We tend to do it as a team, so perhaps someone else might do readings or intercessions. Because of our training, we can perhaps do more than just the bare minimum. I think we also know how much this means to those who come, so it is a real privilege and responsibility. We try to make it as meaningful as possible."

Paddie Collyer, who is a churchwarden, Lay Worship Leader and Lay Preacher at **Niton**, said: "It was six to eight sessions, every other Saturday, with some homework to do. One person lecturing on

our course led services in Ryde for people with dementia, and I thought we could do something similar here on a Sunday afternoon.

"And so once a month we held a service in the village hall rather than at the church which has a steep path. It was ecumenical, with hymns and a talk, followed by tea and cake. People attended because they were lonely and enjoyed the service and the companionship. It ended because of the pandemic, but we want to get it started again."

And Sven Tester, who is a Lay Worship Leader and Lay Preacher at **Chale**, said: "I used to lead occasional services in London. I became treasurer and churchwarden at Chale and

enjoyed Prayer Book Evensong. I was prepared to offer a reflection rather than a sermon, and I typed out every word of the first one I gave.

"The preachers' course was very helpful, as we had eight full days, every other week. We learned something of the history of theology, we watched others preaching, and then we preached ourselves, and the videos of us preaching were analysed. I enjoy preparing to preach, as I learn plenty that I didn't know.

"The course helped us with things such as connecting with the congregation by giving eye contact. I have been greatly influenced by a number of people in the past, and this is a way of repaying them."