

Teenagers can model real unity

WHEN these young people get together each month, their church denomination barely registers.

These 11 to 18-year-olds eat, pray and worship together at High Tide youth services, meeting at a different church each month. And they've been away for three residential holidays to deepen their discipleship too.

What they are aware of is their commitment to Jesus and to each other. And they hope their example of church unity is a model for older Christians.

Hannah Scott, aged 18, is one example of the fluidity these teenagers feel about denominations. She grew up at Leigh Park Baptist and attended Emsworth Baptist Church as a teenager. She helped out at holiday clubs at Church of the Good Shepherd, Crookhorn, and then started to attend its youth group. Now she's on a Discipleship Year based at St Jude's Church in Southsea.

"When we come to High Tide, we don't think about denominations," she said. "High Tide is a lot of fun and we enjoy worshipping together. At the end of the day, there is so much more that unites us, and Jesus calls us to be one Church."

Amber Gadd, 17, from St George's Church, Waterlooville, has been coming to the monthly High Tide youth services for almost two years. She said: "Our church youth group is quite small and meets in someone's house, which is great for reflection and discussion. But we love making friends with people from other churches and worshipping in a bigger group at High Tide."

"We talk about the differences and similarities in our churches,



Above: teenagers of all denominations meet at High Tide; left: worship at the High Tide summer residential last year

at Horndean Baptist Church, sees High Tide as a natural part of the ecumenical relationships he's developed with other local ministers.

but it's great that we all come together and those things don't really matter."

Olivia Gate, ministries co-ordinator at Christ Central, Portsmouth, is one of many local youth leaders who has consistently brought her young people to High Tide events.

She said: "Our teenagers adore High Tide. It's special because they are able to be with so many other young people who know Jesus. So often we can be quick to see divisions, but these young people just see it as one Church."

"Our group has talked about denominations and asked why they matter if people just love Jesus. High Tide reflects that, and I think it's a model for other parts of the Church."

And Sam Ackerman, minister

"Young Christians can find themselves in a small group at church and even more isolated at school, so it's great for them to see they're part of something bigger," he said. "One of the great things High Tide has done is the Jeremiah Project, which involved a few of the older teenagers doing regular Bible study and developing their faith even further. They even get a chance to lead upfront."

"I really believe in ecumenism, and events like High Tide show there are ways for us to come together around what unites us and to learn from each other."

For more details about monthly High Tide youth services and the latest summer residential planned for this August, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/hightide

the day. Organisers try to mix up those from different churches as much as possible.

Organiser Jeremy Hicks, from St John's, Fareham, said: "Studying the Bible together with people of different traditions is a really interesting and enriching experience. It enables us to learn from each other's different perspectives, and also to make lasting friendships with fellow-Christians who we may not have known before."

On Good Friday, worshippers meet in Fareham town centre for a simple service of songs, prayers, readings and a talk. Different churches take it in turns to organise it as an act of witness in the town. This year's service is on March 29, from 10.30am.

And its ecumenical holiday club, for those aged five to 11, has been running for about 10 years. Around 70 children attend, most of whom aren't church regulars and it's staffed by volunteers from a range of churches. This year it's happening from July 29 to August 2 in Gateway Church, Fareham Methodist Church and Fareham URC.

And churches of all denominations in Petersfield have worked together for many years, with records showing that the Free Churches met for prayer back in 1874, with the first interdenominational committee formed in 1913. In 1968, the Petersfield and District Council of Churches was formed, and the Petersfield Housing Association was just one of its legacies.

The group is now known as **Petersfield Area Churches Together (PACT)** and it brings together 11 churches for worship, events and activities.

One of the areas it focuses on is youthwork, and it set up and supports a charity called the



Bishop Jonathan in the chapel at Christ the King College in Newport

Joint schools working well

TWO church schools on the Isle of Wight exemplify the idea of working ecumenically.

Christ the King College in Newport was created in 2008 by the merger of a C of E school and a Catholic school, creating the only Christian high school on the island. And St Francis Academy in Ventnor was created in 2010 by the merger of two C of E schools and one Catholic school.

Last Autumn, Archbishop Justin Welby blessed the chapel at Christ the King College, where pupils of all denominations are able to worship together. That's just part of its 'distinctively Christian' ethos.

The school also has a chaplaincy team, who organise acts of worship,

a students' worship band, and welcomes Youth for Christ teams regularly into the school.

St Francis Academy is committed to daily acts of collective worship, using prayers from C of E and Catholic traditions. It has also put together a bespoke RE curriculum to reflect its unique status. Its ethos is to welcome those of all faiths and none and to promote tolerance and understanding.

Christ the King College has foundation governors appointed by Bishop Jonathan and his Catholic counterpart Bishop Philip Egan. The foundation governors at St Francis are appointed by the academy trust, which hopes to appoint more local churchgoers soon.

Kings Arms. It runs a range of different after-school and holiday groups, offering arts and crafts, cooking, mentoring and support. They meet in youth centres in Petersfield and in Alton, and aim for young people to feel safe, valued and part of a community where they can make good decisions.

Among the groups are one for 12-17 years with autism or other additional needs, and one for young carers who are supporting family members in need. There's also a youth club called 'Unite' for

those aged 11-18 who would like to find out more about the Christian faith. It happens from 4.30pm-6pm in their Dragon Street building.

Chair of trustees John Callaghan, who also leads Life Church, Petersfield, said: "We have seen 20 years of young lives changed. Our congratulations to the unsung heroes who have chosen to serve this group in our society with very little voice."

Find out more on www.pact.org.uk and www.thekingsarms.org.uk