



April 2019

FOR YOUR DIARY

Tue–Thu, 16–18 April – General Assembly Annual Meetings, held at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole.

Sunday, 28 April – South East Wales Unitarian Society Annual General Meeting at Highland Place Church, Aberdare at 11am. Alun Watts will be installed as the new SEWUS President. Following the meeting Alun will conduct a short Service of Worship. (Should conclude by about 1pm.)

Saturday 25 May – Copy deadline for the next issue of the District News.

VISIT OF GA PRESIDENT TO SOUTH EAST WALES

General Assembly President, Mrs Joan MM Cook experienced an evening with a difference when, as part of her presidential visit to Wales at the beginning of March, she attended a welcoming event hosted by Highland Place Church, Aberdare on behalf of the South East Wales District. With Joan's visit taking place on Saturday, 2nd March, just a day on from St David's Day, it was fitting that the occasion was celebrated with a traditional Cawl Supper. The evening was attended by friends from across the District and those assembled were treated to an impressive display by three very talented clog dancers from the renowned and highly successful group Dawnsywyr Bro Tâf.

Our thanks to Highland Place congregation for hosting this successful event.

[For further coverage see Aberdare News and Photo Gallery below.]



A Brace of Presidents Joan and Diana



Elen Morlais

Photos: Joy Foster

FROM THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT

This is the last message I will be writing as District President. The two years since I was installed as President at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd Cefncoed has flown by. I have enjoyed my time as President. As well as visiting and taking services at all of our chapels in the District, I have also endeavoured to publicise Unitarianism in our District when attending events outside the Unitarian movement. For example, I have on several occasions attended social and educational events at a local Mosque. Last week I was very honoured to attend a memorial service held at the Temple of Peace and organised (in haste) by the Muslim Council of Wales to commemorate all those women, men and children in Christchurch, New Zealand who were murdered whilst praying at a mosque. Although the service had been organised at such short notice, a very large crowd of people turned up including the First Minister of the Welsh Government and some members of his Cabinet as well as representatives of other political parties and community organisations. On the Saturday (Grand Slam Day) I took part in an Anti Racist Rally through Cardiff and was joined on the march by Cardiff Minister, Stephen Lingwood.



My thanks go to all SEWUS members who have supported me during my Presidency. I look forward to seeing you all at our next AGM when Alun Watts will be installed as District President. I wish him all the best.

Stephen and Diana's placard reads:
MAE CYMRU'N SEFYLL YN UNEDIG YN ERBYN Y FFASGWYR
(Wales stands united against the fascists)

I would like to end this message by sharing an extract from a book called "A Return to Love" written in 1992 by the American writer and activist Marianne Williamson. The passage is commonly misattributed to Nelson Mandela's Inaugural Address in 1994. It is an extract which I hold close to my heart when I am filled with self-doubt.

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.
Your playing small does not serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We are all meant to shine as children do.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us; it is in everyone.*

*And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

My best wishes to you all. Diolch yn fawr.

Diana Bianchi

FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE UNITARIAN WELSH DEPARTMENT

The year since Derek McAuley announced his retirement as Chief Officer has nearly elapsed and we will be bidding farewell to him at this year's Annual Meetings at the end of April. We welcome Liz Slade and wish her every success as she takes up the post at the beginning of May.

The GA meetings this year are back in Birmingham and are shorter than usual, being held from the 16th to the 18th April. We hope that many Unitarians from Wales will attend, especially on the Wednesday, when Unitarians Wales will be holding a workshop.

There are also events planned closer to home, with the Sunday school festival being held at Sain Ffagan on the 9th June when the children and young people will be holding a service at Capel Penrhiw at 2 o'clock. It would be great if a good number of you could attend to show your support to the next generation.

Brondeifi Youth Club has arranged a Unitarian holiday at Llanmadog on the Gower peninsula between the 23rd and 26th April and have invited any child or young person to join them. This will be an excellent opportunity for them to mix with each other and to forge friendships whilst enjoying an exciting programme of activities.

The Unitarians Wales committee have decided to focus on supporting the congregations to prepare for the Charity Commission changes which will come in to effect in March 2021. The congregations will receive a questionnaire which will enable us to identify training needs, and to ensure that we can set priorities that meet the needs. Our aim is to help the congregational officers by offering advice and support, so that every congregation can face the future with confidence.

I hope that you all get an opportunity to enjoy a Unitarian event over the coming months and please do send your photos/posters/stories to me so that I can promote them on social media. (Photos in JPEG format please.)

Melda Grantham

THOUGHT FOR NOW

(We are indebted to Anne Jones for bringing the following to our attention.)

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 – 1894)

ABERDARE

Women's League

Despite a welcome warm spell in February, we have returned to typical wintry weather in March so Nature is now balancing the scales!

Margaret Slocombe has recently lost her brother and we send our sincere condolences to her. Unfortunately, she has fallen recently and broken her wrist too.

Anne Jones has suffered a fall and broken her shoulder. Christine Roberts has been very unwell and is hopefully, recovering now. Jean Rees has been hospitalised but has recently been discharged, thankfully. Diane Jones, who is in Mountain Ash Hospital and Dorothy Jones are not well. Betty Evans is coping with her mobility problems. We send them all our good wishes.

We had an interesting planning session on 9th January but unfortunately, since then, we have had to cancel two sessions on 30th January and 20th February due to diverse reasons.

On 16th January 2019, we enjoyed the film, 'Brooklyn', which is a real treat for film buffs.

We had a really enjoyable and hilarious afternoon on 23rd January, when we discussed the topic of 'firsts' – and our experiences, including our first job and our first memory. Thanks to Dilys Evans for the suggestion.

The ever-popular Anne Jones' quiz was appreciated once more by all on 6th February.

A lovely soothing afternoon with a pleasant selection of 'Music for Valentine's Day' was enjoyed by everyone on 13th February.

On February 27th, I began proceedings with a talk on 'Old Aberdare,' including a potted history of Highland Place Chapel. This resulted in members' recollections relating to Aberdare coming to the fore. It was a very interesting afternoon.

Jan Bailey gave us a presentation on 'New Acquisitions at Cynon Valley Museum' on 6th March, which was an excellent and highly informative event.

Bad weather and a long casualty list interfered with our meeting on 13th March.

Our District AGM beckons on 20th March at Cefn Coed and we look ahead to a fruitful and successful meeting.

Best Wishes,
Anne Watts

Highland Place was the venue for the visit of the GA President, Mrs Joan Cook, on Saturday 2nd March. Friends from across the District joined together for a Celebratory Supper in the schoolroom. District President Diana Bianchi welcomed everyone and made the introductions. Grace was given by Stephen Lingwood of Cardiff Unitarians. The toast to the District was given by Tony Foster as Chair of the Welsh Department, and the toast to the GA was given by Hilda Dumbleton as EC member.

Joan Cook spoke about the importance of sharing a meal together. Alun Watts, District Vice-President presented a gift to Joan and gave the vote of thanks. It was a delightful evening with a menu of cawl, cheese and bread followed by apple strudel and cream, Welsh cakes and tea or coffee. Wonderful entertainment was provided by three very talented young clog dancers, Elen Morlais, Ioan Williams and Daniel Jones. All three dancers have been winners at the Urdd Eisteddfod on a number of occasions, whilst Daniel Jones has also won first place at the National Eisteddfod. We were all enthralled by the quality of the dancing and the height Daniel reached when jumping. There was also some excellent singing from Elen. Gavin Ashcroft was the piano accompanist.

An evening with a difference was enjoyed by everyone and Joan Cook was very impressed. Our thanks go to those who worked so hard to make this such a successful event.

Aberdare members joined the congregation of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefn Coed on March 3rd for a joint service. Although the weather was inclement everyone thoroughly enjoyed the service and the excellent tea provided by the Hen Dŷ Cwrdd ladies. Thank you all.

Last year was a good year for Charity Funding at the Highland Place. It was a year when the congregation itself faced a £45,500 bill for repairs but despite that, the congregation raised £600 for the Sepsis Trust; £100 for the Yemen Famine Appeal; £175 for NSPCC: over £200 for the Horizon Trust, attached to Mind Cymru and almost £200 to the Zesize Appeal for a school in Africa. Congratulations everyone on a splendid year.

In January we learned of the sad death of Gary Moran, son-in-law of Celia and Humphrey Evans. The funeral took place at Llwydcoed crematorium with Rev Eric Jones officiating.

Anne Jones and Angela Jones represented Highland Place at the Women's World Day of Prayer on March 1st. This year the service was held at Christ Church.

Two donations have already been made to the Merthyr Cynon Foodbank this year, with Aberdare Brownies making a generous donation to our food collection boxes. We were told that usage of the foodbank has increased dramatically since the introduction of Universal Credit in the Merthyr and Aberdare areas. 900 people had been helped during the week of our last donation. We look forward to the day when foodbanks are no longer needed.

Joy Foster's Monday afternoon Meditation Group continues to be a success, with 20 regular attenders.

Several of our members have been unwell over the past few weeks. We hope that all will be feeling better soon, and we send them our best wishes.

Tony Foster

CARDIFF UNITARIANS / UNODIAID CAERDYDD

In Cardiff we have followed the themes of healing, love, and justice in the months of January, February, and March. Each month we have a discussion on the theme and consider different readings from Unitarian, biblical, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and other sources.

On the subject of justice I attended the Wales Rising Up protest of Extinction Rebellion calling for the Welsh government to declare a climate emergency. There's still time to sign the petition on the Senedd website (until 23rd April) asking for this. Just search online for "Welsh Assembly petition climate emergency" and you will find it.

In January we had a great visit to St Illtud's Church in Llantwit Major, and received a tour from the local historian. The church dates back over 1500 years and was a very important site in Celtic Christianity, possibly being the oldest educational institution in the British Isles. The morning finished with a pub lunch in a local hostelry.

I'll end with some words from the Buddhist Dhammapada:

"Never does hatred cease by hating in return;
Only through love can hatred come to an end.
Victory breeds hatred; the conquered dwell in sorrow and resentment.

They who give up thought of victory or defeat may be calm and live happily at peace.
Let us overcome violence by gentleness;
Let us overcome evil by good;

Let us overcome the miserly by liberality;
Let us overcome the liar by truth.”

Stephen Lingwood

CEFNCOEED

Women's League

Our fortnightly League meetings restarted in February but attendance has been hit by the illness of a number of members.

Our baking and sandwich-making skills have been in demand recently. On Sunday, 3rd March we were called upon to provide refreshments for visiting friends from Highland Place who joined our congregation for a Joint Service, and our Branch is responsible for hosting the District League meeting on Wednesday, 20th March.

Togetherhess

We were pleased to welcome friends from Highland Place congregations for a joint service at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd on Sunday, 3rd March. The service celebrated 'coming together' and readings on this theme were presented by chapel members.

Following the service our guests were invited to the vestry for a Tea provided by the Hen Dŷ Cwrdd ladies.

Sadness

Members were saddened by the death on 26th February of Huw Chambers, son of Morgan and Marlene. Huw, aged 50 years, passed away at Ysbyty Cwm Cynon, Mountain Ash where he had recently been admitted as a patient in the Ynysdawel palliative care ward. In accordance with Huw's wishes, a non-religious service was held at Llwydcoed Crematorium on 14th March, conducted by Rev Eric Jones. We extend our heartfelt sympathy to Morgan and Marlene and to all members of the family.

An Interesting Visitor

We are always pleased to welcome visitors to Hen Dŷ Cwrdd and this was certainly the case on 10th February when James Sevitt dropped in on our afternoon service conducted by Phil Griffiths. James, we were later to learn, is a much travelled and talented individual who originally hails from Toronto, Canada but arrived in Wales from New York, USA.

Shortly after having completed his initial degree at university in Halifax, Nova Scotia James moved to Jerusalem to take up a one-year Dorot-Israel-Fellowship. He then completed an MSc in Human Rights at the London School of Economics and later worked for several years in London and Israel/Palestine promoting human rights and intercultural education.

Now researching as a PhD candidate at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York James received funding to visit Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil to research the divisions and resentments between metropolitan centres and neglected peripheries in today's political climate. For the past eight months he has been living in Cefncoed—which explains how he was able to drop in on us. James is now in New York but plans to return, so we hope to have him visit us again (and perhaps conduct a service?).

Best Wishes

Marian Saunders who is a patient at Ysbyty Cwm Rhondda, Llwynypia continues to make quiet progress. We send Marian our best wishes.

Congratulations

To Eleri Griffiths, who is a year 10 pupil at Ysgol Rhydywaun, Aberdare on being elected as a member of the Welsh Youth Parliament for the Cynon Valley. Eleri who is the granddaughter of Philip and Margaret Griffiths has already spoken at the Senedd on the examination pressures of school performance tables on pupils.

Ken Morgan

SWANSEA

In January we had the presentation of a cheque for £200 from the donations collected from the crib. Melda arranged the event and we had a very informative talk about the work of the roots charity. Their work supports vulnerable people to lead an independent life. Stephen nominated this charity so many thanks to him and to Melda for their contributions and of course a big thank you to all those who helped erect and take down the crib, including Lynn, Dave and James.

Rory, Melda and Siân organised a Unitarian stand in Swansea University's Bigger Picture Festival. This event was held over two days and they talked to lots of people about Unitarianism! They also gave away lots of sweets to the primary school children, students, staff and local community.



Presentation of cheque for £200 to Roots

Photo: Rory Castle Jones

We have set up a worship group to arrange special services and it was really exciting to hear the different ideas this meeting produced. As a result in February we held a service all about Fair trade. In June we hope to hold an outdoor service in Caswell, hopefully the weather will be kind although there is a wooden shelter we can use if it rains. We also have the LGBT Interfaith Service led by Rev Wyn Thomas on May 5th at 2pm.

And we have set up a women's working party to sort out the kitchen in the church. We have already had one session which resulted in one cupboard being mended and two full cupboards being emptied and the crockery sorted, washed and replaced. We are proud of these 2 cupboards. Another four to go! Any volunteers? Lynn meanwhile is busy ordering scaffolding and will be helping the electrician to repair the lights in the studio.

We are few in number in our congregation but it is amazing how much we seem to get done with help from friendly trades-people, friends and family. We are fortunate to have the support of so many.

We send greetings to all readers of this newsletter and wish them well.

Hilda Dumpleton

TREBANOS

GELLIONNEN

So far this year life in Gellionnen has been very eventful. Sadly, two of our congregation have each lost two close family members. We extend our condolences to Rory Castle Jones and Steph John.

We then received news of "our baby" born to Jade and Andy Farrel. They are our nearest neighbours living at Spar Farm. Though only a few weeks old, little Aidan has been over to see us twice already. He does not object to being passed from hand to hand, in fact we think he quite likes it.

In January, just after the SEWUS reports were handed in, we were visited by the Mari Lwyd. The Mari Lwyd team comes from Ystradgynlais, but surprise, surprise, this year her friend Mari from Brecon came also and they were photographed together out in the graveyard.

For some years Martyn Edwards has taken it upon himself to take care of and trim the grass but nowadays he has a small eager team helping with the jobs. Our show of daffodils which has quietly grown over the years has been lovely. We are aware of several people who come during the week just to be in the graveyard and one of those came into the chapel when we had a Saturday morning meditation led by Mike Garside of the Swansea Buddhist Group. Mike's meditation session was filled with calm. We concluded with tea, cakes and a collection for MIND CYMRU which amounted to £87.

Swansea Mosque held an open day in March which several of us attended. The mosque has been converted from a huge church left unoccupied for many years. It is now pristine and well loved. We were made very welcome, given written information and lovely things to eat. We were taken on conducted tours of the building (even had a personal guide if requested) and some were fortunate enough to be in one of the prayer halls for the “call to prayer.” We have written a letter of thanks to our Moslem neighbours.

On the following Sunday Sandra Beynon provided us with a delicious lunch in the chapel and we travelled on to Cardiff where we were to visit the Reform Synagogue. Once again we were made very welcome. Our two hosts, Stanley Saffa and David Cohen, gave us lots of information. They took out one of the precious scrolls for our close perusal, answered our questions and talked to us about the lives of Jews in England and Wales over the centuries. Once again, the synagogue has been lovingly converted from its former life as a chapel, and the community have installed some very beautiful stained glass windows. This is the synagogue where our Anglo-Welsh poet Danny Abse worshipped.

When Buddhist Mark Garside heard of our two visits he invited us to visit the Swansea Buddhist Centre and we now look forward to doing this soon.

The President’s Supper in Aberdare gave us an opportunity to meet with Joan Cook and also to meet with each other. The clog dancers who came to perform especially for us are superb.

Our wonderful accompanist Lawrence Bowen has encouraged us through a few new hymns/songs recently and since we have the purple, the green and the Welsh hymnbooks there’s plenty more to learn!

We continue to produce a monthly box of goods for the local food bank and were thanked in the free monthly magazine for our support as a chapel.

At this time of year we appreciate the effort of our fire lighters. The building is too lofty to be heated but it is good to see smoke rising from the chimney and to come in to a glowing fire.

Marian Littlepage

WICK

Our lovely old chapel looks beautiful and welcoming and of course it is – but – and sadly there is always a but – our ‘built on’ toilet has come away from the main building, and so we have a re-building problem. Hopefully this will be completed this year. Services are as usual, and our congregation is very supportive. My personal thanks go to our chairperson and organist Helen Lewis who comes from Neath to fetch me to take our services. We are continuing with some ‘different’ service themes and format and our members enjoy taking part. We always say to everyone – A warm welcome awaits you.

Our best wishes to all our District friends.

Julianne Morgan

PHOTO GALLERY – more photos of the President’s Cawl Supper, courtesy Joy Foster





MEN'S GROUP

We had a leisurely start to our first meeting of 2019. With some of our number unable to attend and the weather forecast not particularly encouraging for a visit, we decided the best course of action was to go directly for a meal. So, the Bute Arms in Aberdare town centre was our destination where we enjoyed a very good meal at very reasonable prices. Our next visit will most probably be to Penderyn, to see the historic church of St Cynog, if we can gain access! (the church closed in 2018) Failing that it will be Penderyn Antiques.

Tony Foster

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Copy-deadline for the next issue of the South East Wales Unitarian News: **Saturday, 25 May.**
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