



FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday, 15 February 2020 – Safeguarding Seminar at Nottage Chapel (Please see back page)

Sunday, 1 March 2020 – On her visit to SE Wales, Rev Celia Cartwright, President of the Unitarian General Assembly, will conduct worship at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefncoed, CF48 2PR at 11am. The service will be followed by a pre-ordered Sunday Lunch at Cefncoed Rugby Club, CF48 2NB. Cost approx. £15.00

Saturday, 14 March 2020 – Copy deadline for the next issue of the District News.

Tuesday, 7 April to Thursday, 9 April – The 2020 GA Annual Meetings at the Hilton Metropole Hotel in Birmingham.

FROM THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT

I am writing this column after Christmas Day and just before New Year's Day.

I hope, like me, you, all, had an enjoyable Christmas and were able to share it with your family and friends. On Christmas Day, I visited my four grandchildren, whose ages range from 3 to 23 years of age. My 3- and 5-year-old grandsons were very excited that Santa had called with so many toys while my 10-year-old granddaughter was hedging her bets, as to who had delivered her Christmas presents! Meanwhile, the 23-year-old granddaughter, who was recovering from an operation, was just glad to be with her partner and immediate family.

I cannot believe it is now just over 4 weeks since we commenced our Christmas celebrations with our District Carol Service at Penrhiw Chapel in Saint Fagan's National History Museum. What a wonderful start to the celebrations with over 50 people present at the service on that first Sunday in Advent. About 10 of the congregation were visitors that day to the service.

Unlike previous years, instead of asking each congregation to supply their own readings, the SEWUS committee decided, this year, that the Service would be centred on readings from Charles Dickens' "Christmas Carol". There were 8 individual readings, 7 of which were delivered by a member from each of our congregations and the final one was delivered by me.

I would like to thank all the readers, who performed magnificently and many thanks to the Rev Lewis Rees, who led us in a thought-provoking prayer and to Stephen Wilson for his accompaniment in playing the keyboard. The singing was wonderful, and all contributed to the warmth of fellowship and prevalent festive mood on that day.

Many thanks to Lis Dyson-Jones for organising the service and for producing the readings. Finally, I would like to thank Tony Foster for designing and printing the Order of Service leaflets.

After the service, many of us availed ourselves of refreshments at the Museum's café, where our own Father Christmas, namely, our Treasurer, Eric Jones handed out 5-pound notes to those, who had paid the parking fees.

All in all, it was a truly enjoyable celebratory day!

May I wish you all a peaceful and happy New Year.

Alun Watts

FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE UNITARIAN WELSH DEPARTMENT

Blwyddyn Newydd Dda! Happy New Year!

As we look back and reflect on the year that has gone past, it's likely that we all, as individuals do so with mixed feelings. There will be sadness when we remember those we have lost during the year, many joyful

occasions to recall and probably some regrets as well. It is the same for organisations and communities, and for Unitarians Wales, 2019 can be looked back upon with a certain amount of pride as well. Although it is true that overall membership numbers are declining, attendance numbers at some congregations are up, and this is an encouraging sign that our message is being heard, at least in some areas.

We live in troubled times, with increasing divisions and political uncertainty threatening the stability of our world, as well as the very real consequences of global warming becoming more apparent daily. As a movement we are in a very good position to offer opportunities for people to come together and share their worries, as well as to take action to create a kinder, more equitable and sustainable world. The challenge for this coming year is to ensure that we are visible, accessible and welcoming havens for all of those who are searching for communities such as ours. A new all Wales bilingual website will provide a platform for every congregation to share their message, news and information as well as being a gateway for more general information about Unitarianism, for those who are not already members. There will be training provided for those individuals from each congregation who will be responsible for keeping their pages updated later in the year, but please do consider in advance who you would like to nominate from your congregation to receive the training.

In the meantime, may I wish you all a happy, healthy and prosperous new year, and please do not hesitate to get in touch if there is anything that you feel I may be able to help you with.

Melda Grantham

THOUGHT FOR NOW

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

In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.

Albert Camus (1913 - 1960)

ABERDARE

A special Language Service was held at Highland Place in November. The service, which was led by Rev Eric Jones, was on the theme of the 23rd Psalm. A good congregation listened to the psalm read in 10 different languages – Eric Jones reading English, Christine Roberts reading Welsh, Mark Jones reading French, Dilys Evans reading German, Robert Servini reading Italian, Imanol Barcenilla reading Basque, Elizabeth Jenkins reading Russian and Polish, and Bill Jenkins reading Latin and Esperanto. Thank you to all those who took part.

On 10th November, a memorial plaque was unveiled in the church, by Humphrey Evans. The plaque was to commemorate 50 years of service to the church by Humphrey's wife Celia, who died earlier in the year. It was a very moving occasion with a short speech given by Rev Eric Jones. We were very pleased to be able to welcome members of Celia and Humphrey's family for the occasion.

Highland Place congregation was treated to four excellent Sundays in December. The first Sunday, we joined friends from across the District for our annual Carol Service, held at Capel Penrhiw, St Fagans. It was a very enjoyable service based on Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'. The singing was excellent and our thanks to Stephen Wilson for accompanying on keyboard.

On Sunday 8th December, Aberdare Unitarians held a Christmas service for the community at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon. It was a service of readings and carols and we were joined by the congregation of Ebenezer Chapel, Trecynon, Trustees of Addoldai Cymru, Friends of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd and there were some who had family connections with Hen Dŷ Cwrdd who had travelled some distance to be with us. It was a very successful event.

On Sunday 15th, a full church was once again treated to an outstanding evening of singing by ReChoir, led by Nathan Jones. Their repertoire included a tribute to Welsh stars, Mary Hopkin, Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and local band the Stereophonics. There were songs from the movies, Disney songs, songs from the shows, pop songs, carols and some Welsh classics. Arrangements of all the music was by Nathan. A big thank you to ReChoir, as some of their members had travelled from as far as London and Devon to entertain us.

Our final service of 2019 was held on 22nd December. It was a service of readings and music, led by Rev Eric Jones. We were pleased to welcome old friends, many had travelled some distance to join us, some new faces from Llandow and members of the Meditation group.

Readings were given by Rev Eric Jones, Gaynor Richards from Highland Place Meditation Group, and Gareth Watts. Two beautiful pieces on violin were played by Margaret's daughter Jocelyn who had just returned from China. Bill Jenkins played the tenor recorder, our organist Grace played the flute, duetting on two pieces with her brother Jacob who played the organ. A wonderful way to end the year.

The church windows were once again beautifully decorated by groups who use the church, the Meditation group, U3A Gardening group, Women's League and Caradog school, and we were delighted that Caradog school requested to use the church for their end of year concert.

Finally, I must thank the congregation of Highland Place who through their generosity, donated half a ton of food to the Merthyr Cynon Foodbank in 2019.

Tony Foster

Women's League

I hope everyone is feeling refreshed following very enjoyable Christmas and New Year festivities.

However, I am sad to record that Dorothy Jones has passed away and Eric Jones officiated at her funeral on 22nd November. Dorothy was a lovely lady in every respect and bore the deterioration of her health with fortitude and without complaint.

She will be sorely missed with the gentle humour of her writings, her common sense approach to life and her softly spoken optimism for the future.

I am pleased to report that Jean Rees is recovering and has joined us, recently.

In tribute to the late Celia Evan's dedication to Highland Place Church, including her greatly missed devotion to Women's League, a plaque was installed in the main Church for everyone to see and was unveiled by Humphrey Evans.

On 30th October, I delivered a talk on 'Women of WW1' and described not only the resilience and bravery of those, who volunteered as nurses, but also, those women who maintained essential services and those, who worked in toxic munitions factories. I also praised wartime housewives, often ignored by history, who had to feed and nurture families with meagre rations, while combating ever-present poverty. The talk was very well received.

On 13th November, members enjoyed a relaxing musical session listening to members' choices from CDs.

On 11th December, members relished a delicious Christmas lunch with all the trimmings. Thanks to Christine Roberts for arranging this festive event.

Our thanks to Anne Jones, who decorated the allocated Church window for the Women's League. We all admired it and that of Joy Foster's 'Meditation' Class window, which featured an outstanding alpine scene, lit by fairy lights.

Finally, on 18th December, members enjoyed our annual 'Gift and Carols' session.

Before I end, I wish to convey many thanks to Lis Dyson Jones, Anne Jones, Joan Harlow, Joy and Tony Foster, Christine Roberts and Barbara Hughes for their invaluable contributions to the smooth running of Aberdare Women's League.

Furthermore, I wish to thank all members for their continued support.

May you all have a Happy and Healthy 2020!

Anne Watts



CARDIFF UNITARIANS / UNODIAID CAERDYDD

Happy New Year! Blwyddyn Newydd Dda! December was a time for much celebration in Cardiff. Beginning with our district carol service at Penrhiw Chapel in St Fagan's Museum on the theme of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, we continued with a Welsh language Christmas service on 9th December, a Hanukkah service on 15th December and a Christmas and Winter Solstice Carol service on 22nd December with both Christian and pagan elements. This was our biggest service of the year, with the Meeting House full of people.

We are now in a new year and a new decade. Though this usually might be a time to celebrate and look forward with optimism, I think many of us in our Unitarian congregations and beyond are struggling with that right now. Devastating wildfires in Australia demonstrate the severity of the climate crisis and there is still much uncertainty and fear in the political life of the UK. In difficult times we gather together to light the flame of hope. That is part of what it means to be a Unitarian community.

In Cardiff we are beginning a process of deepening our spiritual health. We are doing this by running *Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health*. This will be a course, running once a month, based on reading the book by David Usher. It will begin on Thursday 13th February at 6.30pm, with Step One: Develop a Personal Spiritual Practice. It will be held in the Quaker Meeting House. It will continue once a month on second Thursday of the month (12th March, 9th April, 14th May, etc) for twelve sessions. We'd be very happy if any of our friends across the South East Wales District wanted to join us for this course. It is open to all regardless of beliefs or disbeliefs, Unitarians and non-Unitarians.

Blessings, love, hope, and strength for all of us in this new decade and beyond.

Stephen Lingwood

CEFNCOED

Women's League

Our postponed trip to the Old Railway Line Garden Centre took place in November when Branch members, together with a few friends, climbed aboard the hired minibus and we set off, mid-morning, for the journey through the picturesque Wye Valley between Brecon and Hay on Wye, where the Old Railway Line complex—combined Garden Centre, Farm Shop and Restaurant—is situated at the village of Aberllynfi (Three Cocks). After a most welcome cup of coffee in the café to set us up, we roamed the complex at will. The re-scheduled date was ideal for those of us who were on the lookout for items to purchase as suitable gifts as the centre was decked-out in its Christmas display mode. In late afternoon, after having been fortified by a tasty hot meal in the restaurant, we set off on the return journey. A most pleasant and enjoyable day.

In December, we were off once again—but no minibus travel on this occasion; this time we used our bus-passes on the local bus service to Merthyr Tydfil. The bus station is only a stone's throw from the Castle Hotel, which is where ten League members and friends gathered to celebrate our Christmas Lunch. We enjoyed a fine meal there and had a happy time together. Also, it was interesting to learn that, just like the majority of us, the manager of the Castle Hotel is a resident of Cefncoed!

Remembrance Sunday

As in each succeeding year from 1974 on, the Remembrance Ceremony at Cefncoed War Memorial and the Community Remembrance Service at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd were conducted by Ken Morgan, with parade marshal Major Stephen Price, MBE in charge of the marchers. There was a large public turnout, with the road through the village being closed to traffic by a police presence during the ceremony and parade. It was disappointing that (as usual) there was a reluctance amongst many of those standing at the roadside, to venture inside the chapel for the service, but it was encouraging to welcome a number of 'first time' visitors along with the regulars. A retiring collection was held in aid of the Poppy Appeal.

Out and about

On Sunday, 1 December a group of members attended the District Christmas Service at Capel Penrhiw, St Fagans at which Jackie Evans presented a Reading on behalf of the Hen Dŷ Cwrdd congregation.

Our men folk visited the Rhondda with the Men's Group in November and attended the Men's Group Christmas Lunch at *Alfreds* in Pontypridd in December.

Services over the Festive Season

It was decided not to hold a service on 29 December. Our final gathering of 2019, a service of carols and readings, was on 22 December. Owing to the unavailability of our organist, music was provided by Unitarian Music Society CDs.

We welcomed the new year with a service on 5 January conducted by members of the congregation on the theme *The Turning of the Year*.

Birthday Greetings

We send belated *Happy Birthday Wishes* to our Chapel Organist, Marian Lewis who celebrated her eightieth birthday on 1st January.

Ken Morgan

NOTTAGE

Happy New Year from Nottage.
Blwyddyn Newydd Dda i bawb o Notais.

Well it has been a busy few months at Nottage. Since we last wrote, we have had Remembrance Sunday where Lewis led a heart-warming memorial service to all those who have lost their lives or suffered in conflict, be they human, animal, assumed ally or perceived enemy.

Then of course we just had the month of December which has been full of activities to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The District Christmas Service was, as usual, a special time for as many of us as possible from the District to worship together. Eight of us were able to attend from Nottage, which meant we had a lovely minibus ride to St Fagan's once again. Penrhiw chapel is indeed a very special place in all our hearts.

On Sunday 8th December we had around 60 in attendance as we once again welcomed the Cadets & Staff from 1358 (Pontardawe) Squadron, Royal Air Force Air Cadets for our annual joint Christmas service. This year the theme was: 'Christmas away from home in the Armed Forces'. Two of the cadets prepared short presentations on Christmas traditions among service personnel serving overseas during the festive period, specifically in Cyprus and Afghanistan. We were especially taken by the talk given by Mr Paul Deering, who is a Civilian Officer in the Squadron, with his recollection of his time in the Army away from home during the First Gulf War. He and his best friend served together, and his friend had saved the mince pie from Christmas Dinner to give to Paul to have on his birthday in January. Sadly, a few weeks later his friend was killed in action. Ever since that day, mince pies have meant so much more to Paul than a tasty Christmas treat. Luckily for us, Pontardawe Squadron's band has recently reformed and they treated us to a wonderful medley of Christmas tunes, it really was a superb occasion.

This year, at Nottage we decided to collect money for charity in lieu of sending Christmas cards. So if you wondered why you did not receive a card from us at Nottage please be assured that the money went to Water Aid.

The congregation, thanks to the efforts of Mrs Helen Steele, is also a long term supporter of the charity 'Crisis at Christmas' and in an attempt to boost funds we held a raffle and we raised over £300 for the two charities. Helen has supported Crisis at Christmas for many years, so it was wonderful to support this important charity once again this year. It saddens us greatly that so many people are now homeless, with the number increasing year on year.

The run up to Christmas became very busy and unfortunately, the dreaded virus hit quite a few of us. Thankfully, although there were many missing, thirty-three of us still managed to get to our Family Christmas Carol service, where Lewis instructed the children (both young and old!) how to make a Christingle. Mrs Cheryl Rees also treated us to a solo of the famous Johnny Mathis song 'When a Child is Born'. Cheryl's contribution was received with rapturous applause, which was especially nice as she had not had a voice for most of the week, and last-minute technical difficulties meant that she had to sing a cappella. Father Christmas had also come early and left some gifts under the tree that Lewis distributed to the children of the congregation. As usual, Lewis wore a fine Christmas cardigan for the occasion.

On Christmas Eve, Lewis had a call from Rose Owen's daughter-in-law, Debbie informing us that Rose's health is sadly deteriorating. Rose has been living in Picton Court for about 3 years; however, with the help of her family she often manages to get to special services such as Christmas and Easter. However, she was not well enough to be with us this year, but always remains in our thoughts.

Avril and Janet's brother Philip has been unwell of late, having had a heart operation and is still in hospital recuperating, we wish them all well.

Jean's brother who lives in Australia is not in the best of health but as often as they can they manage to FaceTime each other.

June is managing to get to chapel as often as possible but is still waiting to hear about possible knee surgery.

I think that is about all from us at Nottage this time apart from one thought, the coming of a New Year is often a time for reflection and now that we are entering into a new decade, (although officially the new decade does not begin until we go into 2021) maybe it seems an apt time to reflect on all that has been good and not so good over the last 10 years and to see what each of us can learn from each experience we encounter in our lives.

So from all of us at Nottage we wish you a very Healthy and Happy New Year and hope that each and every one of us has a great 2020.

Cheryl Rees

SWANSEA

Our harvest service was a great success in November. We had over 30 sitting down to Cawl, bread and cheese after the service. The cawl was made by Melda, Zac and Igor and tasted delicious. It was good to see so many people in the hall enjoying themselves.

The Swansea Congregation have celebrated Christmas in style this year. First we had our Christmas dinner at the Brewer's Fayre where 15 of us enjoyed a very pleasant evening. Thanks to Margaret for organising the event.

Two of our congregation enjoyed the weekend organised by Gellionnen Chapel. They had a fantastic time and really enjoyed the trip to Gloucester and Cheltenham.

Our Congregation enjoyed the trip to Penrhiw, St Fagan's for the District Xmas Service. It is always a joyous event. The readings from "A Christmas Carol" and the singing of carols is a good start to the festival of Christmas. And the get together afterwards in the cafeteria added to the occasion. Many thanks to all those who were involved with the organising.

We held our public Carol service at the Swansea Church on the 22nd December. We were delighted that there were over 25 in the congregation. Thanks to Melda for leading our service and Sion who was our soloist. And thanks to all those who decorated the church. The mulled wine and mince pies afterwards was also a great success with people keen to stay and chat.

James, Lynn, and Stephen erected the crib in record time. However, the lights failed during the following week which we learnt was due to a small child attending the dance school switching the power supply off at the plug! We have now invested in a plastic cover for the switch so that access is extremely limited! It has been quite a spectacle with the lights and music with many passers by stopping to look. With the crib taken down now we can announce that we have collected £205.06 which will be given to a local charity.

We are having a special meal out on Thursday 9th January to wish success to Zac who is leaving us to work in Belgium for a year. We really hope that on his return to this country he comes back to Swansea. He has been such an asset to the church and has proved to be great at making cawl and washing up. We will miss him very much. We are also celebrating with Igor who is going back to Ukraine to get married! He will then be applying for a visa for his wife to come to Wales too. Igor has also been so helpful with setting up the crib and always having a screwdriver and/or matches to save the situation. So a two-fold special occasion on Thursday.

We have managed to clean the guttering on the lower roof as our builder has invested in a machine specialising in high roofs. Scaffolding has been erected and hopefully it will now be able to clean the higher roof. Of course, we still have the problem regarding the possibility of bats.

On a sad note Hilary is having an operation at the end of January. We wish her a speedy recovery and hope that she will be in church soon. Our best wishes go to her, Dave and family. We hope that all our congregations have a happy and peaceful new year.

Best wishes
Hilda Dumpleton

TREBANOS

GELLIONNEN

Our November Shoe Box Appeal, held on a Saturday morning, saw the filling of more than 150 Christmas boxes.

By this time of course, we were thinking of the forthcoming Christmas celebrations. In the November SEW News our esteemed editor reported that Michelle Davidson had taken charge of the *plastic* nativity figures and would restore them, but of course they are *plaster* figures. In fairness to you Ken, you have to read my handwritten accounts! The pieces are very old, large and heavy. Michelle has transformed them, covering up the knocks and chips without taking away anything of their considerable age and loveliness. We usually manage to get each piece unpacked and set out by a few young people, and this year was no exception, thank you Isobel and Byron.

We always decorate the chapel after first having a shortened service. By the end of service the scent of holly and ivy, rosemary, bay, fig leaves and pine needles has begun to settle into the building.

Our Christmas Dinner this year was very special indeed because our past chairman, Clive Evans and his wife Mair were with us. Clive stood down from his many years of chairmanship on health grounds and it was a delight to have him with us at the dinner. As a big thank you we presented Clive with a painting of the chapel chosen at the local exhibition of artist Joanna Jones. Chairmanship is now in the capable hands of Lawrence Bowen who, like Clive, has a lifelong connection to Unitarianism in the Swansea Valley.

It was good to have Lis Dyson-Jones take a December service with us – we don't see her often enough – and on the same morning Lawrence gave a beautiful rendition of "O Holy Night". I think that was the beginning of Christmas for many of us.

Our service of carols and readings was conducted by Julie Nedin and supported by Anne Jameson with several of her young music pupils on cello and keyboard – what a pleasure! Our favourite choir was with us too, the Eclectics perform here once or twice every year and they can never come often enough.

On now to Dr Rory Castle-Jones who took to the pulpit on Christmas Eve in a chapel lit entirely with candles. People came in to a glass of warmed punch, and the sound of our musicians also warming up. It is always good to see folk in the gallery. We can always look forward to hearing Lynnford Jones and Sandra Jones and there will always be one or two who have never been in the building before.

Collections taken up at both our Christmas services are to be split evenly between two very special charities, Unity in Diversity which meets in our Swansea Church, and Ysgol Maes y Coed which needs to have new life breathed into its Sensory Garden. The collections amounted to £640.

Our very special thanks go to the Social and Special Events Committee which has worked its socks off in recent months distributing notices, lighting the chapel with hundreds of candles and setting the fire. Thanks also to our treasurer Robert James who thought to have our paving slabs pressure washed before the two Christmas services.

On a sad note, we record the death of the father of Rachel Evans. Rachel is one of 2019's new members and a very active Special Events worker.

To all of our friends, may we wish you health and many good things for 2020. God bless.

Marian Littlepage

WICK

We here in Wick hope everyone will have a good New Year.

We are so glad that our treasurer, Mansel Lalis is recovering well from his accident. He was badly missed from our Christmas Service. The village turned up trumps and we had a very good congregation with everyone taking part in some way, the chapel was warm and bright and although we missed Mansel's singing our carols rang out across the green.

We look forward to a hopefully happy New Year.

Julianne Morgan

MEN'S GROUP

Our November visit, the final of 2019, was to the holy shrine of 'Our Lady' at Penrhys in the Rhondda. It is situated on a hillside overlooking both valleys of Rhondda Fawr and Rhondda Fach, at about 1,100 ft above sea level. Until the late 16th century, Penrhys was one of the holiest sites for Christian pilgrims in Wales. Penrhys has a rich religious history dating back to mediaeval times, though few settlements other than farmsteads can be traced to the area. Penrhys is significant for a mediaeval monastery, the holy shrine of "Our Lady" built at the holy spring of Ffynnon Fair. In 1538 the shrine was destroyed during the English Reformation, and the area appeared to fall into decline. With the arrival of industrialisation in the Rhondda Valley during the 19th century interest in the religious history of Penrhys increased. An archaeological dig at the old chapel was carried out in 1912 and a new statue of the Virgin Mary was unveiled in 1953.

We then travelled down the mountain for lunch at a hostelry in Porth. Unfortunately, we were too many to be accommodated in a busy restaurant, so it was a quick walk to Morrison's for lunch in the cafeteria, and very enjoyable it was too!

We met up in December for our Christmas lunch at Alfred's in Pontypridd and we were delighted that Arthur Saunders and Gwynn Pritchard were able to join us for this very enjoyable occasion.

Tony Foster

SAFEGUARDING SEMINAR

A Safeguarding Seminar will be held at Nottage Chapel on Saturday, 15 February. It is hoped that Safeguarding Officers from each congregation will attend and additional members of our district congregations are welcome. The District has purchased copies of the General Assembly Safeguarding Pack, 'Safe and Sound' and this will form the foundation of the information and discussion of our session together.

Coffee and Tea will be available from 10am and the session will start at 10.30am, finishing no later than 1pm. We are grateful to Nottage for agreeing their venue.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Copy-deadline for the next issue of the South East Wales Unitarian News: **Saturday, 14 March 2020**. Items for publication should be sent to: - **kenneth.morgan25@talktalk.net** or Ken Morgan, 25c Holford Street, Cefncoed y Cymer, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 2RW. Tel: 01685 379016.