



South East Wales Unitarian News

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November 2019

FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday, 1 December – District Christmas service at Capel Penrhiw, St Fagans at 11am.

Saturday, 4 January 2020 – Copy deadline for the next issue of the District News.

Sunday, 1 March 2020 – Visit to South East Wales by GA National President

FROM THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT

During the summer months, I have had an opportunity to visit all the congregations in the District with the exception of Wick, which I hope to visit in the near future.

It is heartening to observe that some of our congregations have new members and although we are starting from a low base, our total membership in the District is increasing albeit at a very small rate.

I am sure that most of you are aware that Capel Penrhiw, the 18th century chapel sited in the Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagans, is an old Unitarian chapel originally located at Drefach Felindre – a village in Carmarthenshire. The chapel was re-erected at St Fagans in 1956 and since then Welsh Unitarians have held services or events in the chapel twice yearly – in June and September.



Capel Penrhiw, Sain Ffagan

Originally, the Welsh congregation at Cardiff were responsible for organising the events there but two years ago the responsibility passed to the Unitarian Welsh Department. It has been agreed that from this September, the South East Wales Society will take over the arrangements for future events.

It was decided that SEWUS would ask congregations in our District to speak briefly on an inspirational individual who had served their congregation. This Service was held on Sunday 15th September and four of our congregations participated. Sarah Boyce set the stage for the tributes that followed from each congregation.

Diana Bianchi, who was representing our Cardiff congregation, spoke warmly about the life of the late Margaret Evans, who was regarded as the matriarch of the old West Grove Church for many years. Representing Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefncoed, Ken Morgan spoke of the late Rev Marles Thomas, who was the minister at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd from 1936 to 1951, and delivered inspirational services. At times, the congregation there numbered over 150! How we wish we could see those numbers in our congregations, today!

Representing Nottage Church, the Rev Lewis Rees spoke about the Rev Evan Lloyd, who began his ministry at Nottage in 1806. It is remarkable that he, his son, grandson and other descendants ministered at Nottage for approximately 120 years. Sadly, we are not aware that any descendants have entered the ministry, recently. Finally, Tony Foster representing Highland Place Church, Aberdare, spoke about Rhys Hopkin Rhys, who was one of the founders of Highland Place. He was known, locally, as Blind Rhys as he suffered a colliery accident. He was also greatly involved in the opening of Aberdare Park, which celebrated its 150th Anniversary this year,

Furthermore, the Rev Eric Jones not only played the keyboard but gave a short summary of future plans for events/services at Penrhiw.

The minister of our Cardiff congregation, Stephen Lingwood led us in prayer, and we sung three Welsh hymns and one English hymn.

It was a very uplifting service which was attended by 28 people.

Please note that this year's District Carol Service will also be held at Capel Penrhiw on Sunday, December 1st.

As this is the last District News for this year, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda

Alun Watts

FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE UNITARIAN WELSH DEPARTMENT

Our new Chief Officer, Liz Slade has now been in post for six months and has visited Wales three times during this period, demonstrating her commitment to Welsh Unitarianism. She is currently working with the EC on preparing a strategy document for the movement which will look at how we can do things differently, focusing more on what we can provide to meet the spiritual needs of society. We need to collectively explore what we can offer, and the GA can support us by connecting congregations across England and Wales to share good practice and success stories. They will also improve the national website and are looking at how to better support local websites.

We will be having a stand at the National Eisteddfod again next year, so if anyone has any ideas on what they would like to see in it, then please do get in touch. Any new ideas on how to present Unitarianism as being relevant in today's world would be welcomed.

Thank you to everybody who has returned the Chapel Mark questionnaire. The response has been good, and it has also been good to see that overall the governance arrangements within our congregations is better than expected. The next step is to agree on priorities and make arrangements on how best to support congregations to meet the legal obligations. It may mean concentrating on the more urgent issues first, such as ensuring that every congregation has a safeguarding policy, and also making sure that any training sessions are geographically targeted as there are different needs in the two districts. We will be working hard on this over the coming weeks and months and hope to have a programme of support in place by the new year.

In the meantime, I hope that everybody takes advantage of the many opportunities to attend the various services and events coming up and I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Melda Grantham

ABERDARE

Women's League

On 11th September, we held our planning meeting, when we had a vote and members agreed to hold our meetings fortnightly as far as possible. This will be on a trial basis until our next planning meeting on 15th January 2020, when the issue will be reviewed.

Jean Rees has been discharged from hospital and Dorothy Jones remains unwell. Diane Jones has been transferred to Ysguborwen Care Home, Llwydcoed. Christine Roberts is currently unwell. We send our best wishes to all.

Our sympathy is conveyed to Joy Foster on the loss of her mother-in-law, Mrs Dorothy Foster and our condolences are extended to Tony Foster.

We held a 'Natter and Craft' session which was enjoyed by all on 25th September.

On 16th October, Aberdare and Cefn Coed branches attended the District Autumn meeting at Highland Place Church. The meeting ran smoothly and at the end of the meeting, members viewed a short film in respect of Women's League National Project, 'Smile Train'. It was very moving and informative. Then, everyone enjoyed the warm hospitality and delicious buffet provided by the Aberdare Branch.

Best Wishes

Anne Watts

On Sunday 1st September during fellowship, we were reminded that it was 80 years since the German invasion of Poland. Highland Place member, Elizabeth Jenkins was a young child in Poland at that time, but she remembers having to escape from their home and the trauma of the events. It was a fascinating story she told.

Six members of Highland Place joined friends from across the district for the service at Capel Penrhiw on 15th September. It was a very enjoyable service, led by District President Alun Watts, where we heard stories of some Unitarians who deserved recognition for their contributions in our churches and communities. Tony Foster gave a short talk on Rhys Hopkin Rhys (Blind Rhys), member of Highland Place Church. He was an influential figure in Aberdare during the late 19th century. He worked tirelessly for the poor and for public health at Aberdare. He brought in a modern sewerage scheme for the valley and encouraged the building of the main road from Aberdare to Maerdy, the road which leads from Aberdare town over the mountain to the Rhondda Valley and passes Highland Place Church. Blind Rhys was also the main influence behind the creation of Aberdare Park, the first Public Park in Wales, which is celebrating 150 years this year. Thanks go to Rev Eric Jones for accompanying the singing on the keyboard.

Our Harvest Service took place on 29th September. We were once again joined by members from Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefncoed for a café style service at the front of the church. Eric Jones led the service and we were served sparkling fruit juice, cake and grapes during the service to remind us of the fruits of harvest. Two readings were given by Margaret Edwards from Cefncoed and Mark Jones from Aberdare. We were also entertained by the excellent female choir 'Vocelle', who have links with Highland Place. We look forward to hearing them again in the future and our thanks go to Stephanie for the arrangements. An amazing 85 kilos of food was donated by members of the congregation, for the Merthyr Cynon Food Bank.



'Vocelle'

Photo: Joy Foster

At the end of the service taken by Lis Dyson Jones on the 13th October, we were treated to some wonderful music played on the violin by Margaret Slocombe's daughter, Jocelyn. Jocelyn is a violin teacher and examiner and is currently spending 3 months in China as an examiner. Jocelyn played two pieces of music from the films 'Copacabana' and 'Ladies in Lavender'. We hope that Jocelyn will be able to play for us again in December when she visits Aberdare.

The Strawberry Tea event held at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon in September was very successful with over 40 people visiting the chapel, with many photographs being taken. We were lucky the weather was reasonably kind apart from the wind and there was an amazing amount of food available. £260 was received in donations towards the refurbishment work. Thanks go to Christine Moore for making all the arrangements.

Tony Foster

CARDIFF UNITARIANS / UNDODIAID CAERDYDD

This autumn we have been considering the themes of “God” and “Freedom” – both important words in our Unitarian faith. We have held discussions on each of these topics as well as a discussion about the present and future of our congregation, what we value in our community, and our hopes and fears for the future.

On a pleasant cool autumnal Saturday, we also had a little congregational walk around Llandaff and along the Taff. The ground was scattered with conkers, so it definitely felt like that time of year. It is an area full of history and beautiful places to walk, even that close to the city centre.

Climate change continues to be an important issue for us to consider. In September I was able to attend the Climate Strike, when thousands of young people marched on the Senedd with much energy and passion. I also attended an event for One World Week in Newport about how churches and other communities could respond to the climate crisis.

I will leave you with a quote from women's rights campaigner Susan B Anthony:

“We have before us but the one work to do, that of giving to every human being the fullest possible liberty to develop his or her spirit just in accordance with its own promptings.”

Stephen Lingwood

CEFNCOED

Women's League

As reported in the previous issue of the District News, our planned visit for afternoon tea at the Old Barn Tea Room at Ystradgynwyn, Torpantau had to be postponed. The rearranged date was 21 August and as the day got closer the weather forecast gave us some cause for concern. On the day itself however, it was better than expected and we were able to sit outside—until we were forced to seek sanctuary within the building in order to avoid the attention of a swarm of wasps. This was a repeat visit to the Tea Room for us as we were there two years ago. It has lost none of its charm, and the fine fare on offer was as tasty as ever – individual choices of sandwich fillings, marvellous cakes and delicious cream scones. Excellent!

On 16 October, we hired a minibus in order to attend the District Autumn Meeting at Highland Place Church, Aberdare. Following the business matters we watched a short informative film, “Smile Train” about the League's national project for 2019/20 which will help provide reconstructive surgery for children born with a cleft lip and/or cleft palate. Our thanks to Highland Place Branch for hosting the event and sending us home well-filled after a delicious buffet.

We now look forward to our November trip to the Old Railway Line Garden Centre at Three Cocks between Brecon and Hay on Wye.

Open Doors Heritage Event

The 272nd anniversary of the founding of the chapel was celebrated at a congregation-led evening service on Sunday, 8 September. The celebration was part of Cadw's ‘Open Doors’ Weekend, with Hen Dŷ Cwrdd open to the public on the afternoons of 7 & 8 September. The visitor footfall over the weekend was disappointing, but the pleasing comment, “*Delighted to visit – a hidden gem,*” written in the visitors' log by two visitors from Abercynon, made it all worthwhile—for them, and for us.

Out and about

A small group of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd members attended the District Service at Capel Penrhiw, St Fagans on Sunday, 15 September. The service recognised the contribution to our heritage made by some lesser known Unitarians. Ken Morgan paid tribute to the late Rev Marles Thomas who is fondly remembered by present day members who recall his ministry at Cefncoed when they were youngsters.

On Sunday, 29 September, a number of us travelled to Highland Place, Aberdare for a Joint Harvest Service. During the service, 95-yr-old Margaret Edwards presented a Reading on behalf of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, and we enjoyed the melodious singing of the all-female choir, Vocelle. We thank Aberdare congregation for their welcome and the splendid tea following the service.

Full of Beans

Following our Harvest Thanksgiving service on 6 October we all went home full of beans (or at least *carrying* beans) through the generosity of Phil Griffiths who arrived at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd laden with bundles of runner beans which he distributed to all present.

Ken Morgan

NOTTAGE

Well, over the last few months we have had a very busy time at Nottage.

We have been very pleased to see our congregation growing steadily, and we are now seeing a regular attendance of 18, which is triple the number who were regularly attending three years ago. We are indeed enjoying the benefits of having a minister.

We have also welcomed a number of new friends through the door to our weekly Friday club, which involves half an hour of meditation from 10:30am followed by coffee and friendship from 11am. We are now seeing a regular attendance of 12 people each week. All proceeds from the suggested donation of £1 given for a cuppa & biscuit go to charitable causes. Which leads me on to our recent MacMillan Cancer Support coffee morning. This year, through donations for cups of tea/coffee & cake; a raffle; and a sales stall of donated items, we raised a whopping £295! Not bad for such a relatively small number of us.

We had a lovely trip to St Fagans in August where 6 of us travelled in a minibus to enjoy the service in Capel Penrhiw. The Nottage congregation's contribution was written and delivered by Rev Lewis Rees on the subject of the Rev Evan Lloyd and his descendants, who between them served the chapel for 120 years.

At Nottage we continue to support the Porthcawl Food Bank, and prior to the summer holidays we organised an additional collection due to the extra demand caused by parents having to find food that might normally be provided by the state in the form of free school meals. This was alongside our regular Harvest Festival service collection in September. As usual, we accept donations year-round, and make a special effort at Christmas, Easter, and Harvest time.

At the end of October, we will be having a 'My Favourite Hymns' service, with all the hymns being chosen by members of the congregation.

We continue our longstanding support of the Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group through saving 20p, 50p and £1 coins in a collection box atop the organ. Generally, the money collected gets sent to them quarterly; therefore, over £80 was sent to the charity last month. We always look forward to receiving a lovely postcard with words of thanks from them.

Jeff Protheroe has been unwell of late and is currently not attending chapel as often as he would like, we wish him well as he is very much missed.

We have been delighted to see June Pattimore at service a few times of late. With the help of her son Robert she has managed to attend despite the severe pain she is in with her knees.

Rose Owen is comfortable in Picton Court Nursing Home in Porthcawl, and Lewis visits her as often as he can. Her son and daughter in law are hoping to bring her to service occasionally when she is feeling strong enough.

We hope that everyone in the District is well, and we send love and light to all.

Cheryl Rees

SWANSEA

Our congregation have been pleased to welcome several people to our Sunday services over the last few months. We have seen some students including a Ukrainian who is on a short stay here in Swansea. All are welcome to our church family especially when they come prepared to light the chalice or even bring WD40 to oil the lock.

Margaret is improving steadily from her hip replacement and can be seen without her crutches in the church. It is good to see her back in action

We have also welcomed Melda who is our ministerial student for the next six months. We are looking forward to her leading us in worship and developing our social action. We are now planning a harvest service on Nov 3rd with a supper being served afterwards. Melda says she makes good Cawl! There is an open invitation for SEW Unitarians to come along and sample her cooking! Unity in Diversity has also been invited and the harvest food donations will be going to the asylum seekers to help them support their families.

Our building renovations have now been put on hold because of.....BATS! Apparently, they are now in hibernation and so we cannot do anything until May. Meanwhile our church is suffering whenever it rains. Lynn has spoken to several bat experts so hopefully we will be able to move forward when allowed.

On a brighter note, we are looking forward to our Christmas dinner on December 5th and our public carol service on December 22nd. Everyone welcome!

Sincere wishes from all at Swansea to everyone in our District.

Hilda Dumpleton

TREBANOS

GELLIONNEN

The August Folk Service was very special indeed – five of our “old chapel members” returned from hither and yon! There was Lilian and Gary Dermody, Anne and Andy Fryer and Mary Stone. All were actively involved in chapel life over the years and when they moved away, we wondered how we would manage without them. It was so good to be here welcoming them back.

Once again, many thanks to our great folk musicians who attend this service every year with their thoughtful and beautiful musical offerings.

Our September bus trip took us to Capel Brondeifi where we were met by the Rev Alun Wyn. It was a lovely day, giving us an opportunity to walk around the immaculate graveyard and admire the building’s stained glass. We ate lunch there and wish to thank the Brondeifi ladies for getting the kettle boiling and making us so welcome. On then with Alun Wyn to be met at Llwynrhydowen by the Rev Wyn Thomas and given a potted history of this very special and treasured chapel. On again to Capel y Groes and another spot of history and so to Aberaeron for fish and chips. It was a great day; the company was excellent and we much appreciate the efforts of Rhys Castle Jones who arranged the trip. A quick raffle made £117.20 for our Development Fund and £30, paid in by people who were subsequently unable to be with us, was donated to the food bank.

We celebrated harvest as ever by concluding this service with an on the spot lunch. We have tea/coffee and cakes every Sunday and are fortunate that the congregation has some excellent cooks.

Little Aiden James Farrell was christened by Rory on a rainy day which did nothing to dampen the pleasure of spirits of the many people attending. Everyone was invited back to nearby Spa Farm to celebrate the event. Jade and Andy have a lovely baby son and we wish the three of them all good things.

Our most recent celebration was Sandra Beynon’s animal service attended by eight well behaved canines. We had Amy and Margot, Charlie, Topsy, Ben, Chester, Finlay and Toby.

Our last get together of the pub club took place in Clydach’s Piccolo Bar situated in the old Barclays Bank. It transpired that we were meeting in the bank manager’s office, and well filled it was too!

Big birthdays have been celebrated by Steph John and Megan Price, and a 25th wedding anniversary by Hayley and Neil Cooper. Congratulations!

Julie and Martyn are home from their Spanish pilgrimage walk and we look forward to hearing more about this.

Siân Evans is now at Dundee University and we shall see her over Christmas.

Artist Joanna Jones is back in the Swansea Valley where she spent her formative years. Five Gellionnen members went to the opening of her exhibition in Pontardawe and were thrilled to see that three of her paintings were of Gellionnen Chapel – described as “unadorned and simply beautiful.”

Our big old plastic nativity set has been unpacked and checked. The characters are much chipped and battered and are presently in the hands of Michelle who will sympathetically restore each piece. On 15th December we shall set it out again and decorate the chapel after a shortened service.

Julie will take our Carol Service on Sunday 22nd December and Rory will conduct the Midnight Service on the 24th.

Marian Littlepage

THOUGHT FOR NOW

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

There is nothing ordinary, there is a wonder and complexity in the smallest things.

Pam Brown (1928 - 2014)

WICK

It was lovely to meet together after our August break. During August the village committee had organised a walk around the village for the new residents of the recently completed housing project, and they visited our chapel taking a lot of interest in the very old graves in our graveyard. Hopefully some of these newcomers may attend service.

Our Harvest Thanksgiving Service was very well attended with everyone present taking part. We received a wonderful collection of food and toiletries which Helen took to the Bridgend Food Bank. This is a long-standing custom of our chapel and the donations are greatly appreciated. We were very saddened by the sudden death of Lorraine Davies, daughter-in-law of our late well-loved treasurer Joyce. Lorraine was married to Mike at our chapel and it was always a delight to see her at service. We send our deepest sympathy and love to Mike and their family. Our best wishes to all in the District.

Julianne Morgan

MEN'S GROUP

The group met on 19th September at Morlais Golf Club, not for a round of golf but to visit Morlais castle. Some of us took a leisurely walk over the golf course to the castle, whilst others travelled in a golf buggy. The castle was built in the 13th century by Gilbert de Clare, 3rd Earl of Gloucester and it overlooks the Taff gorge. Very little remains of the building now, but a vaulted basement room at the bottom of the keep remains intact and quite a lot of the moat is visible. It is thought that a lot of the building was destroyed by lime quarrying at the base of the castle. The views of the Brecon Beacons and the Taff Valley from the castle were breathtaking. Lunch was enjoyed in the clubhouse. Our thanks to Phil Griffiths for making all the arrangements.

Tony Foster

NEWS FROM GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1. Positive steps were made in developing General Assembly strategy, building on the previous 'Next Steps' work as well as finding some new directions:
 - Develop a series of events – involving Unitarians and other partners – to explore and express what we offer to today's society
 - Improve our websites and leaflets to share a more up-to-date story of ourselves and reach more people.
 - Ask the complex questions about the future of leadership of spiritual communities.
 - Connect and share learning with those exploring and innovating in spiritual communities, including outside of religious organisations.
 - Develop plans for supporting the formation of new fellowship / small group gatherings as a model of growing the denomination
 - Review the General Assembly's approach to youth work to better develop and invest in families and young people.
 - Support congregational development by improving the sharing of information and ideas.
2. The EC support a collaboration being explored with Historic England, with the potential to lead to new ways to support congregations to manage their buildings' fabric and heritage. The intention is to explore how this might extend to Wales and Scotland too.

As a first stage an exercise of mapping Unitarian chapels with the relevant Historic England references needs to be undertaken. If anyone is interested in volunteering for this exercise, (full support and any expenses will be provided), please contact Simon Bland (Ministry & Congregational Support Officer) at Essex Hall for further information.
3. It was agreed to develop a new General Assembly staff role to help build connections and communication between congregations, to make it easier to share information and ideas. The job description is being developed.
4. The EC agreed the budget for 2019-20. This included additional funds compared to the previous year, to support new strategic initiatives.

CAPEL PENRHIW PICTURE GALLERY (Photos: Lis Dyson-Jones)



Rev Eric Jones



Sarah Boyce



Diana Bianchi



Ken Morgan



Rev Lewis Rees

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Copy-deadline for the next issue of the South East Wales Unitarian News: **Saturday, 4 January 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.