

# BABELL CHAPEL / CAPEL Y BABELL

## PENSARN CAERFYRDDIN

### Spring Newsletter

### Cylchlythyr y Gwanwyn



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2016

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This newsletter has been digitised as part of a project to archive material relating to Llangunnor so that a record exists for future generations

Thanks to Mike Shephard for permission to do this

The logo consists of a blue rectangular box with a dark blue border. Inside the box, the words "LLANGUNNOR" and "NETWORK" are written in a white, serif, all-caps font, stacked one above the other.

LLANGUNNOR  
NETWORK



## Dear Friends

It's a strange thing to say but the modern church only thinks about The Easter faith during the season of Easter. It is only at Easter that we think of the Resurrection and of the life to come; it is only at Easter time that we sing the hymns of the Easter faith.

This is so wrong.

It is almost as if we have forgotten the origin of Sunday, the Lord's Day. Unlike the Jewish Sabbath which commemorates how God rested after the work of creation the Christian Sunday commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. It was on this day that he rose from the dead.

In the early church the resurrection was the fact upon which all else was founded and it is to this central fact that we must return continually.

*It is the Easter faith, the faith in the risen and living Lord, which makes us able to meet life.*

If we believe that Jesus is risen and is alive, then all life is lived in his presence. We are not alone. We are called upon to make no effort, to endure no sorrow, to face no temptation without him.

*It is the Easter faith, the faith in the risen and living Lord, which makes us able to meet death.*

It is the Easter faith that compels us to believe we have a friend and a companion who lived and who died and who is alive for evermore, who is the conqueror of death. The presence which is with us in life is with us in death and beyond.

A writer tells how his father died. His father was old and ill. One morning the writer tells how he went up to his father's bedroom to wake him. The old man said, "Pull up the blinds so that I can see the morning light." The son pulled up the blind and even as the light entered the room, the old man sank back on his pillows dead. Death was the coming of the morning light.

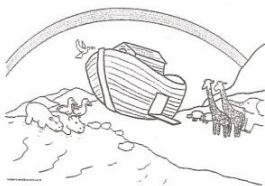
*It is the Easter faith, the faith in the risen and living Lord, which persuades us that evil shall not have the last word.*

On Good Friday the powers of darkness did their worst and thought, no doubt, that God and Goodness had been defeated. In point of fact it was evil that was defeated that day and Jesus, in his resurrection, demonstrated that love is more powerful than hate and non-violence more effective than malice and aggression. He demonstrated that, ultimately, the victory belongs to those who sacrifice themselves, for the sake of others, on a cross. We live in troubled times and it appears, on occasion, that the forces of evil, as typified in organisations such as Isis, are certain to triumph. It is when we entertain such thoughts that we need to see again the vision of an empty tomb and of goodness going forward to gain the world.

Have a very happy Easter

Mike Shephard

## LAUGHING AT THE RAIN



Our children are in the habit of ringing us up when it is 'bucketing down with rain' and making a joke of it. Here are some of their comments:

*"Just saw Noah going past. He gave me a wave."*

*"Dad, there's a sale on in B&Q. They are selling arks at half price. Fancy going in shares?"*

*"Whether the weather be wet, or whether the weather be fine, we'll weather the weather whatever the weather, and pray for drier times."*

## **FAMILY NEWS**

I must begin our Family News with a piece of news about which you are all now aware. This is a copy of a letter handed to our church secretary on 08/02/16.

### **To the congregation of the Babell Zion Newydd Uniting Church**

Dear Friends,

Let me begin by saying that age is starting to take its toll and that I no longer have the energy I had, even a few years ago. On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February, for instance, I lead a very fruitful and successful service at Babell, which incorporated items by the local school choir and the presentation of prizes for the Children's Letter to God Competition. There was an excellent congregation and, some time ago, I would have gone home on a high. Would it surprise you to know that I spent the afternoon in bed, tired out and drained?

You may say that it is 'the time of year' but that is not really the reason. The fact is that my dual role of minister and Family Court Adviser is exhausting me and I am now close to 'burn out.'

I have worked at two jobs for forty five of my forty eight years in Christian Ministry, combining church work with working as a probation officer or Family Court Adviser. Both of these professions are stressful and, looking back I am amazed at my coping capacity.

In my secular occupation, I have never been content to exercise a traditional role, initiating outdoor activities for offenders and setting up the 'New Outlook Club' which won awards for community enterprise.

As Regards church work I have coupled a preaching and pastoral ministry with setting up Drop-In Centres and Friendship Centres, the Friendship Centre here being the fourth such enterprise with which I have been involved. I have been fortunate enough to have touched many lives.

I obviously could not have done this without the support of my wife, Gwen who has been prepared to move with me on numerous occasions, being content to accept what little left over time I have been able to give her. I am also mindful of my children, now grown up, and of their childhood complaint – "Dad, when will you play with me?" My Grandchildren have said similar things.

Thus to the thrust of my letter.

There is never a good time to tender one's resignation as a minister and, given recent developments, there is argument for 'soldiering on' – if only to see Babell Zion Newydd become established as a united church.

That said, the graveyards are full of people who once thought themselves indispensable and who are probably amazed that the world continued to exist without them.

In short, the time has come when I must listen to my body as it says, increasingly loudly, "enough is enough" and as it counsels me, before it is too late, to focus more on health and family matters.

Having discussed the matter with my family I have therefore decided to bring my retirement forward and tender my resignation as minister, this to take effect, not from early September, as originally planned, but from the end of May 2016.

I am aware that filling pulpit rotas is not easy and, if necessary, am happy to fulfil some, if not all of my engagements for the summer period.

That said I have to attend to many things this summer, some of which need urgent attention and I will be away quite often. I will not be available in the week – thus my decision to bring my retirement forward.

I do hope that you will see the wisdom behind my decision and not feel that I have let you down in any way. I have really enjoyed my time at Babell and feel that these past four years have been productive for the church and for me. Our friendship will continue.

There will be occasion in the coming weeks to thank you, both as individuals and as a church for your love, support and regard .

With every good wish  
Mike



If I have one regret in retiring it is that I will not be present, at least not for any length of time, in helping establish a united church here. I have known our friends at Zion for over thirty years and their decision to join with us excited me greatly. That said, one did not expect the process to have taken quite so long or that 'the powers that be' would have placed so many hurdles in our way. All my experience to date has been in 'congregational' churches where decision making is relatively quick. The 'bureaucracy' of the Presbyterian system is a different animal completely and it has seemed, at times, that it has been like a giant paperweight preventing the winds of the spirit moving.

Saddened though I am not to part of your progress towards unity I know full well that I am not indispensable to the success of the venture.

The final vote in favour of uniting was very encouraging with those who were eligible to vote numbering thirty two in total. The vote took place in both churches at the same time, with only two people voting against the proposal. There are also a sizable grouping of 'non-members' who have told me, individually, that they are very much in favour of this development. I highlight the words 'non-member' as I dislike differentiating between the two groups. I believe that everyone who attends church regularly is a 'member' of that church and should be part of any decision made – but that is another story. What matters now is that both congregations have spoken in favour of the project and have provided a mandate for fundamental change. I am certain that our two congregations will quickly become one family in Christ.

The size of the vote in favour is not to suggest that the members of Zion cast their vote with light hearts. I would think that 'brokenness' would be an apt description of their feelings as they were voting. They were voting, in effect, for saying goodbye to a building that had been a life-long home. How often do we speak of walls having ears? Think of what those walls will have witnessed over the years and of the stories they could tell. I do not believe in the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation – whereby the elements of bread and wine are changed into the literal body and blood of Christ. I would argue, nonetheless, that the walls of a church in which people have worshipped God over many years, do assimilate the very air of devotion and, in consequence, contain an 'atmosphere' which, in itself, is a form of benediction. As we welcome Zion into our church let us be aware that, along with hope for the future, there is a tale of heartache and bereavement and loss.

Subject to all other things being equal, the new venture will be launched on Easter Sunday when we will be reminded again of the victory over the grave, symbolised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a time of new life and fresh beginnings – of the darkness of a cross giving way to the reality of the coming dawn. **LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS! CHRIST LIVES!**

**Please remember that on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March, at 6pm there will be a service of thanksgiving at Zion.** This will be an occasion of thanksgiving for all that Zion has achieved in the life of the community and, indeed, in the wider area over the years. It will also be an occasion of 'letting go' and of 'moving on.' Please make every effort to be present.

We extend our very best wishes to all who have been unwell of late. These include our friends Ann Harris and Ken Loomes (partner of Megan Griffiths) who have spent time in hospital and have had surgery. We think too of Keith Anders who has had another fall. We remember Vi Williams, Nan Thomas and Esme Phillips, all of whom have been unwell. We send love to Marian Folland who had health worries some weeks ago but who is now back to her old self. We think too of Carol, another member of Zion who has also been unwell. By the time the next (my final newsletter) goes to print in late May we will have greater knowledge of other of Zion's members and of happening in their lives. Meanwhile we assure all of you of our concern.

It is strange to be talking about Christmas in February but our Candlelit carol services in December were as enjoyable and challenging as ever. Thank you to everyone who made them such a success. My thanks, as ever, to Helen Gibbon for organising one of the services. One of the blessings of having Zion join us is that, in the person of Carol, we will have another gifted organist and that she and Helen can share the musical input affording each other the space to have some time off. Our Choir may yet become a reality.

It is good to see our Sunday club growing again with seven children now attending regularly. That is so encouraging for us and, especially so, for Helen and Sian.

Our thanks, in anticipation, to Linda Owen and Trevor Lloyd who are busy preparing for our St David's Quiz and Cawl on 29<sup>th</sup> February.  
Diolch Yn Fawr.



## **SEASONALLY AFFECTED DISORDER**

Have you ever known so miserable a winter? The rain has been relentless throughout Britain and, not least of all, here in 'Wet' Wales. I think all of us will echo the sentiments expressed by Siobhan, one of the contributors to our 'Children's Letters to God' competition, who asks God to "bring back our summers with sun and winters with snow." Well said, Siobhan! You fully deserved to be amongst the winners of the competition and the full text of your letter appears elsewhere in the newsletter.

Those of you who know me well will be aware that I am prone to depression, particularly in the late autumn and winter months and that life, during this period, can be something of a struggle. I keep smiling, more from habit, than from anything else and when asked how I am, will invariably reply "Fine thank you." The truth, though, is very different. Seasonally Affected Disorder can be a debilitating condition and, this year, it has been more marked than ever. There was a time when I would never have written in this vein. I certainly would not have talked about depression openly in a church newsletter. Still less from the pulpit. Let's be honest. Not all Christian churches are compassionate or caring places. There are some Christians who think that depression and faith are incompatible. Has not God promised his power to those who believe in him? Does not the Bible say that Jesus is able to help his followers triumph over all things? What kind of minister suffers from depression? Believers, surely, are able to rise above such things and will always be positive, up-beat and full of vigour. And as for being on anti-depressants or needing to take more than one annual holiday in sunnier climes; Well! I ask you! How tragic that some churches can be so blinkered and uncompassionate. Have they never read the Bible? What do they make of the myriad unanswered prayers in the psalms? What about Paul's '*Thorn in the Flesh*' which God refused to remove, despite his pleas for healing? Strip away the religious language and you find God telling Paul that it is more important to learn humility from his condition than to be cured of the complaint and that, meanwhile, he must put up with it. God, in effect, tells Paul that there is strength in weakness and that his grace, somehow, will get him through . . . . .

It does. But it is not easy and there are no quick fixes. Prayer is not magic and faith is not a cure-all.

It would be my view that all those who suffer from mental health problems should be more open about the fact. In fact, there is currently a campaign to encourage such openness and to get rid of the stigma which still surrounds the subject. There is no more shame in being depressed than in being susceptible to head colds. They are both part and parcel of the human condition and faith confers immunity to neither.

If I now feel relaxed about having this kind of conversation it is due to an experience in one of my previous churches. The church I am thinking about was a very hard place in which to minister and the atmosphere there was lacking in love and abounding in judgemental attitudes. A previous minister had once said that he "didn't do compassion" and his attitude must have rubbed off on the congregation. It was a cold and uncaring environment and was more of a preaching centre than a church. One Sunday evening, I preached a sermon entitled 'The Darkness and God' and spoke of the God who meets us in the dark places of life – Disappointment. Failure. Doubt. Bereavement and Depression. I acknowledged that depression had been a feature of my life for many years and that being 'under the weather' was an ever present reality, especially in the winter. I admitted to feelings of extreme sadness, unworthiness, low self-esteem and, when winters were very wet and grey, a sense of despair. It didn't mean that I was mad. It signified that I was a human being first and a minister second.

The response was mixed, with some people, predictably, being critical of my openness. One or two thought that such a theme should not be dealt with in the pulpit and commented that I should 'stick to the Gospel.' Others thought it shocking that a minister needed anti-depressants. People of faith should throw medication away and rely on God!!!

However, one person thanked me for the "most wonderful sermon" she had ever heard and asked me to call at her home the following morning. When I did so she confided that she had suffered depression for many years and once, years before and, unbeknown to anyone in the church, had attempted suicide. She had never told this to anyone due to a belief that they would judge her or misunderstand. She had felt ashamed. My sermon, she said, had liberated her and had helped her accept herself, warts and all. She no longer felt alone. If a minister could suffer depression then so could she . . . . From this moment on she would be content to be God's tired, sad and much loved child.

I vowed then that I would never hide my weaknesses as, when dedicated to God, they can be used to help others.

For most of my working life I was a probation officer. I was responsible, at one stage, for the work of the



Llanelli Probation Centre, working with some of the most hardened offenders in the area. I recall, in one group session, asking them to participate in an exercise which involved a spiral of circles moving out from the centre, known as 'the swamp' to an outer ring which designated the start of dry land. The participants had to decide where, in relation to the middle of the swamp they were at present and where they would wish to be in the future. Most, inevitably described themselves as being 'deep in the mire' with all its anguish and pain. With only one exception they all wanted to reach dry land. The exception was a middle aged man who presented as a highly unpleasant individual who had served several custodial sentences. The exercise had, nevertheless, had an effect on him, as became apparent when it was his turn to talk about the future. He accepted that he was well and truly in the swamp and needed to move, outwards, towards dry land. Then he said this:

"I want to be near dry land but not on it. I want to be near the edge of the circle but want to remain within it. I don't want to forget what it is like to be in the swamp. I want to remember the pain and still experience it. In that way I can be of some help to others."

I have never forgotten his words. In essence, he was asking to remain, partly, in hell so he could assist others in their search for salvation. He didn't want to be removed from suffering. At least, not completely as this might result in him becoming deaf and blind to the anguish of others and cause his inner well of compassion to run dry.

Was he right? I think so. Significantly, the minister I mentioned, who "did not do compassion" had led a very privileged life. He had never wanting for anything and, in terms of material wealth and health had lacked nothing. Despite having trained for ministry, he deferred ordination until late in life, when he had already succeeded in feathering his nest. In consequence he had lost the capacity to really empathise with people and, as a pastor, would always be deficient.

I sometimes imagine being given a magic wand, waving it high and saying "Depression be gone!" I might well have been a happier person had I had such a thing. I would, arguably, also have been a more unfulfilled person with less capacity to have touched the lives of others.

Why am I speaking like this now? Largely, I think, because I am on the point of retiring from the ministry, after a career spanning forty eight years and want to bequeath a legacy to this church.

Here are some of the adjectives that, one hopes, will come to people's minds when they describe us. LOVING, ACCEPTING, TOLERANT, NON-JUDGEMENTAL, UNDERSTANDING, WELCOMING, UNCRITICAL, GENTLE, FORGIVING and COMPASSIONATE.

I want us to be a church where depression is not frowned upon or seen as a weakness. I long to bequeath a church open to all and in which everyone, including the low spirited, will feel at home.

Please, never be ashamed to admit to suffering from any form of mental illness. If we are to be rid of the stigma which still surrounds the subject we must be prepared to admit to our weaknesses. If we were to recognise them as such they are our strengths.

Mike

## **LETTERS TO GOD**

I have had the privilege of organising several such competitions over the years. In Swansea, for instance, the competition involved some five primary schools with prizes, on that occasion, being awarded to ten children, of differing faiths, at Memorial Baptist Church Harvest Thanksgiving Service. It was a very memorable occasion. In recent years, the church at Babell, has forged warm links with Llangunnor Junior School and, in December of last year children, in every year group, were asked to submit a letter to God. Judging the letters has been an informative and, indeed, a moving experience and determining the 'winners' was no easy matter. In fact they were 'all' winners. However, we eventually selected thirty letters as being worthy of special mention and, on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February the authors were invited to attend our morning service, in association with the school choir to receive their prizes – a book token each, to the value of £10. Deciding which letters were the 'best' was left to Helen Gibbon and me though, in my case I enlisted the help of my wife, Gwen. Helen judged the Welsh letters. We judged those written in English. The choice we made was, inevitably, somewhat subjective and others might have arrived at different conclusions. For ourselves, we were looking for evidence of originality, honesty, thoughtfulness for others, an awareness of the world's problems and some evidence of spirituality. Here are the English 'winners.' Helen will be commenting separately on those submitted in Welsh. The winners in each year are viewed as being Joint First rather than First, Second and Third.

## DOSBARTH DWYNWEN

Dear God,  
Thank you for keeping me safe and for my nice warm bed.

From Jayden

Dear God,  
Thank you for my mum. She is very special. Thank you for teaching us how to love each other  
Love from Annabelle

Dear God,  
I would like to say thank you. Thank you for my mum because she loves me. Thank you for teaching us how to love. Thank you for giving us friends.

Love from Uswa

### B 1 (3)

Dear God,  
I am writing this letter to say thank you. I am most grateful for the world and my family. I am very grateful for the soldiers who protect us. I am happy to worship you. Please could you keep my family safe. Before I go may I ask you a question please? Is my dad's friend safe in heaven? Thank you for reading my letter.

Love from Ocean Parritt

Dear God,  
I am writing this letter to you to say thank you for the world. I am grateful for my family. I would like you to stop the horrid wars in Paris. Can you save the people who are ill? Thank you for our homes. Please could you stop families fighting? Please could you help people be safe and warm? We wish you could come down from heaven to help us. May I ask if you can make the bullies be nice? Could you give the poor people food and water? Could I give you a few questions? Is my Nanna safe in heaven? Thank you for reading my letter.

Lots of love from Summer Cooper

Dear God,  
I am writing this letter to say thank you. I am thankful for animals like dogs. I am grateful for our family. We wish the violent war could stop. May you let our family be safe. Can you make sure that everyone has clean water? May I also ask a question? Do all people go to heaven? Do people fly in heaven? Is heaven on a cloud? Why do wars

take place? Thank you for reading my letter.

Love from Emily Thomas

### B 1 (4)

Dear God,  
I am writing this letter to say thank you for everything. I am most grateful for our clean homes. I am happy for food and water. I am very happy to have a family. Thank you for my brothers and sister.

I would be thankful if the homeless had a home. I wish you could stop the wars. Can you keep the animals safe? Please could our family be safe? I would like to ask you a few questions. Where do bad people go? Is my Nana safe in heaven? How old are you? Thank you for reading my letter.

From Jessica Thomas

Dear God,  
I am writing this letter to say thank you for everything. I am most grateful for my family. Thank you for food and water. I am very happy to know my Grampa is safe with his mum and dad. I am thankful for all animals and wild life. Please could you make the wars stop? I would be thankful if you could make the floods stop. I would be so thankful if you could make Buster's eye better.

I would like to ask a few questions. Has Grampa got a motorbike? Is Frodo safe? Can people fly in heaven? Thank you for reading my letter.

Love from Lauren Sexton

Dear God,  
I am most grateful for my family. I am so happy. How old are you? Can you please make my family safe? Do people fly in heaven? Please can you make my foot better? I am thankful for food and water. Please make wars stop. Stop terrible floods. Does everyone go to heaven? Where do bad people go? Do people get fed in heaven? Thank you for my bed. I'm sorry for the people who died. That is sad.

Love from Lowri Morgan



## Year Five

Dear God,

Please can you take care of our earth? I don't like war or terrorism! Britain, New York, Italy. Why did you let all the innocent people die? Can we all just get along?

I'd like to share – to give to those who do not have – food, clothes, medicine and education! Why so many poor people?

I'd like diseases and illnesses to be cured. Why do so many loved ones have to be lost to illness? I'd like you to bring back our summers with sun and winters with snow! Please help all the people who have been flooded recently. They've lost loved ones and lost their homes. Please help all the people suffering. Amen.

Siobhan

Dear God,

Help the poor be free from hunger and poverty. Stop the war and conflict between all religions. Please bring us peace and love in the world. Help mankind get through these dark times that we face together.

We pray for peace and harmony in the world. Amen.

Logan MaCallum

Dear God,

I still think you have a role in our everyday lives. The Bible teaches lessons on kindness to each other and lets us know right from wrong. And even though we don't see you these lessons stay with us. I feel very lucky that I have such a good life and wish you could help others who don't have good lives – like people in war. Help people see that we shouldn't hurt each other.

Izzey

## YEAR SIX

Dear God,

The leaves are falling down,  
The trees are growing up,  
Our feet are moving forward,  
But we have had enough  
Of pollution and people destroying our world.  
When, oh when, will our thoughts be heard?

Lily Bradbury

Dear God,

I am only ten years old. I'm not sure how much I believe yet. All I know is that loads of bad things are happening in the world and it is unfair. And I wish they didn't happen. Amen.

Luke Whatley

Dear God,

Thank you for this beautiful life!

I pray for love and peace in our hearts.

I pray for freedom and happiness in our souls.

I pray for our trust in you to be an answer to all our worries.

I pray for love and peace All around the world.

I pray for freedom and happiness in every country.

I believe in your power God!

I believe in your wisdom God!

Please believe in us too God!

Please give us the strength to be as wise as you.

Cezary

What a wonderful selection of letters. Please notice the spiritual maturity developing as children progress through the school. It is good, though to see children of every age demonstrating care for others. Their concern about war is very marked; as is anxiety for our planet. It is also splendid to see children questioning God. Who among us would fail to share in Lily Bradbury's cry – **"When, Oh When, Will Our Thoughts Be Heard?"** The school can be very proud of all the children. Well Done!

## Llythyron Cymraeg

Yes, the school can be very proud of all the children. All the letters were thoughtfully written and followed themes of thanksgiving, intercession and questioning. The following letters were chosen for their personal touches which included ultimate questions, concern for members of the family, concern for the environment and people's destructive behaviour. Such words as forgiveness and generosity, peace and love were used a great deal in these letters. I would like to thank Mike for inviting the school to take part and I do hope that we can repeat the task next year.

Diolch am y safon uchel o ysgrifennu ac am aeddfedrwydd y disgyblion a diolch hefyd i'r athrawon am eu harweiniad.

## Blwyddyn 2

*O Dduw, diolch am Mam a Dad achos bod nhw'n edrych ar ôl fi. Diolch am ddŵr a bwyd sydd yn cadw'n ni'n iach a diolch am fy nheulu a bod ni'n gallu mynd i'r ysgol i ddysgu. Diolch ein bod ni'n gallu neidio, scipio a gwneud ymarfer corff. Diolch am gariad. Amen*  
Rebecca

*Annwyl Dduw,  
Diolch am Mam a Dad. Diolch am gartref clyd,  
Diolch am fwyd a dŵr.  
Diolch am law a haul.  
Diolch yn fawr iawn am y byd a chartref clyd.  
Diolch am y teulu hyfryd yma.  
Diolch am bopeth a diolch am fy nghï i. Amen.*  
Harri

*Annwyl Dduw,  
Diolch am farw ar y groes.  
Diolch am gartref clyd.  
Diolch am y byd  
Diolch am fy nheulu a ffrindiau a diolch am gariad.  
Amen.*  
Miriam

## Blwyddyn 3

*Annwyl Dduw,  
Hoffwn ddiolch yn fawr am greu ysgol i bobl ddysgu. Diolch Dduw am fwyd i bobl fyw. Hoffwn ofyn yn garedig i chi Dduw i greu byd heddychlon.  
Yn gywir  
Harry Thomas*

*Annwyl Dduw,  
Hoffwn ddiolch am deulu neis sy'n talu i ni fynd i'r ysgol. Diolch am ddillad twym i wisgo bob dydd.  
Diolch am hadau sy'n tyfu i wneud bwyd i ni fwyta.  
Hoffwn ofyn yn garedig i chi Dduw am sicrhau fod bwyd ar gael i bawb yn y byd.  
Yn gywir  
Ellis Jones*

*Annwyl Dduw  
Hoffwn ddiolch yn fawr am deulu a ffrindiau. Rydw i'n hoff iawn o chware gyda phawb. Mae'n hwyl gyda ffrindiau caredig. Hoffwn ddiolch am y ddaear sy'n llawn lliw, mae'n hyfryd. Hoffwn ddiolch am ysgol sy'n gwneud ni'n smart iawn.  
Yn gywir  
Caleb Powell*

## Blwyddyn 4 Buddug

*Annwyl Dduw,  
Ysgrifennaf atoch i sôn am bethau yn y byd. Yn gyntaf rydw i eisiau sôn am y pethau da rydych chi yn ei wneud i ni. Rydych wedi creu ein byd i ni fyw arno. Rydych wedi rhoi teulu i fi a bwyd a dŵr glân a chartref cynnes. Rwyn ddiolchgar am y cyfle i chwarae rygbi, pel droed a llawer mwy. Rwyn ddiolchgar am ysgol oherwydd rydw i'n gallu dysgu pethau newydd bob dydd.*

*Rydw i yn grac gyda ti oherywdd rwy yn gadael pobl i starfo ar y strydoedd ac yn gadael nhw ddim ond gyda blanced. Rwyn grac oherwydd rydych yn gadael llifogydd i ddigwydd yn y gwyliau Nadolig. Ac mae pobl ymhob gwlad o'r byd yn dioddef o gancr. Mae pobl yn lladd ei gilydd am ddim rheswm. Mae pobl yn colli pobl o'u teulueodd ac mae nhw yn drist iawn oherwydd mae eu tadau ddim yn dod nôl adref. Mae pobl yn cael damweiniau mawr ac yn mynd i'r ysbyty. Rydw i eisiau i ti newid hyn fel bod pawb yn y byd gyda tŷ a digon o arian i brynu bwyd a llawer mwy. Rwyf i ddim ond moyn un peth arall sef bod pawb yn y byd yn hapus.*

Thomas Williams: Buddug

Annwyl Dduw

*Ysgrifennaf atoch i sôn am y byd roeddech chi wedi creu. Diolch am greu'r byd yn lle arbennig i fyw. Diolch am roi anifeiliaid ar y byd. Diolch am fara, ffrwythau, llysiau, y gwair gwyrdd a'r awyr las.  
Diolch am dai mawr ac ysgolion.*

*Duw, wyt ti wedi clywed am y pethau gwael sydd wedi digwydd ar y byd? Mae rhyfeloedd, llifogydd, pobol dlawd. Gallet ti helpu Dduw? Mae pobl yn cael eu lladd mewn rhyfeloedd yn y byd.*

*Diolch am greu y byd ond gallet ti newid rhai pethau. Gallet helpu pobol dlawd, helpu pobol sydd a chancr. Wedyn mae'r rhyfeloedd - gallet helpu ni. Mae lot o bethau gallet newid yn y byd. Diolch am wrando.*

Oddi wrth Talen.



Annwyl Dduw,

Diolch i ti am greu byd mor hyfryd. Ti wedi bod yn helpu ni am lawer o amser. Diolch i ti am fy nheulu, fy nghartref a llawer mwy. Rwy'n diolch am fy nheulu oherwydd mae nhw na drwy'r amser i fi ac am fy nghartref. Mae'n gynnes iawn ac mae pawb yn ddiogel yn fy nghartref.

Ond mae pobol eraill yn y byd sydd ddim yn cael cartref clyd na dillad da. Duw, gallet ti helpu nhw? Mae dal rhyfel yn mynd ymlaen a mae llawer o bobl yn cael eu lladd.

Rydwi i moyn i wledydd y byd fod yn ffrindiau a phobol dlawd i gael cartrefi saff.

Felly Dduw, wyt ti'n gallu helpu? Diolch am ddarllen.

Oddi wrth Sophie.

### Blwyddyn 5 Gwenllian

Annwyl Dduw,

Mae'r Nadolig wedi mynd a chefais i lond sached o anrhegion. Diolch! A diolch am Sion Corn wrthgwrs! Ond yn ogystal â hyn mae'n rhoi cyfle i fy nheulu a finnau i ddathlu penblwydd Iesu.

Pwrpas y llythyr hwn yw i ddweud pa mor ffodus i ni. Dw i'n teimlo'n ofnadwy am beth sydd wedi digwydd ym Mharis o ganlyniad i derfysgaeth difrifol. Pam nad ydych chi yn medru stopio hyn? Rwy'n clywed pethau ar y newyddion ac weithiau dwy ddim eisiau ei wyllo ef oherwydd rwyf rhy ofnus a thrist.

Dyma ambell syniad am bethau yr hoffwn ei weld yn newid yn y byd. A allwch chi ystyried rhain ac efallai ein helpu i'w wella:

1. Llai o drychinebau naturiol
2. Mwy o garedigrwydd
3. Dim clefydau yn y byd e.e. cancr
4. Gwahardd arfau.

Yr eiddoch yn gywir

M.FF Richards

[Megan Fflur Richards]

Annwyl Dduw,

Dwi yn ysgrifennu atoch chi i ofyn i chi stopio'r ymladd i gyd, yr heintiau a'r tannau i gyd. A wnei di helpu i roi bwyd, cartref ac arian i'r bobl dlawd. Allwch chi hefyd ein helpu i berswadio pobol i stopio hela'r anifeiliaid i gyd. Gadewch i'r anifeiliaid yn rhydd o'r sws. Helpwch ni hefyd i beidio defnyddio nwyon a phetrol sydd yn dinistrio'r byd.

Oddi wrth Rhys

Annwyl Dduw,

Rwyf yn ysgrifennu atoch i ddiolch i chi am y Nadolig. Chi yw tad Iesu Grist. Rwy'n ffodus iawn drwy'r flwyddyn ond does dim geiriau i gael am Nadolig. Rwyf yn cael anrhegion gan Sion Corn a gan y teulu. Pan rwy'n agor anrhegion Nadolig mae'n gwneud i mi feddwl am y tri gwr doeth yn dod ag anrhegion i'r baban Iesu.

Bob dydd Nadolig mae fy nhad yn coginio bwyd Nadolig felly rwyf yn moyn diolch i chi am fwyd. Mae'r stori am y baban Iesu yn wych ond hebddo chi bydd dim o hyn yn digwydd ac fe fydden ni ddim ar y byd hwn. Byddai'r byd hwn ddim yma felly rwyf am i chi wybod fy mod i'n ddiolchgar iawn i chi am hyn.

Felly i fi mae Nadolig yn amser arbennig iawn o'r flwyddyn. Dydw i ddim yn credu bod amser mwy arbennig na'r Nadolig- amser geni Iesu Grist.

Roedd Iesu yn ddyn arbennig iawn nad oedd yn gas ta beth oedd yn digwydd iddo, Yr eiddoch yn gywir

Frea Thomas.

### Blwyddyn 6 Llywelyn

Annwyl Dduw,

Hoffwn ddechrau trwy ddweud diolch i ti am fy nghorff egniol i redeg at Mamgu ac yn ôl. Mae yn bwysicach ein bod yn cael addysg na chwarae ar offer technegol.

Diolch am ein creu ni mor brydferth ac hefyd am ein teuluoedd a ffrindiau sydd yn ein caru. Teimlaf bod teulu yn bwysicach na ffrindiau ond rwyf yn hoffi cael ffrindiau.

Byddaf yn drist pan fydd rhai pobl yn meddwl eu bod yn well na phobl eraill. Rwyf yn credu bod pawb yn gyfartal.

Roedd y newyddion bod rhywun wedi difrodi ein hysgol wedi fy ngwneud yn trist iawn. Gobeithio gwnaiff yr heddlu eu dal.

Ydy hi'n bosib i ti helpu pobl Ffranc a gweddill y byd i gael gwared o derfysgwyr ac i gadw pawb yn ddiogel?

Diolch am ddarllen y llythyr ac am fy ngharu i. Dion Love.

Annwyl Dduw,

Rwyf am ddechrau trwy bregethu. Pam mae sut gymaint o ladd a dwyn yn y byd hwn heddiw? Pam mae cancr ac ebola? Pam mae rhyfela? Pam mae pobl yn ysmegu cyffuriau? Pam mae pobl yn difrodi pethau pobl arall? Pam ddanfonest ti Iesu i'r byd i farw?



*Ar y llaw arall, diolch am roi teulu a ffrindiau i mi. A diolch am fwyd a bod digon o arian gyda ni i brynu bwyd a moddion pan wyf yn sal. Diolch bod digon o degannau gyda fi pan wyf fi'n ddiflas. A diolch am fy mod yn gallu rhedeg a neidio. Diolch am fy helpu i pan wyf yn drist a diolch am fy mod i yn gallu mynd i'r ysgol i ddysgu a diolch am yr athrawon sy'n rhoi gwaith i mi.*

*Yn y dyfodol efallai os ydym yn helpu ein gilydd gallwn stopio rhyfela a dwyn a lladd a plis gwna yn siwr bod Dad a Mam yn hapus.*  
Sam

**Annwyl Dduw**

*Rwyf am ddechrau trwy ddweud diolch am bopeth yn y byd fel bywyd hapus a iechyd da er mwyn rhedeg a chwarae gyda'n ffrindiau. Hefyd diolch am gael mynd i'r ysgol a chael addysg ac hefyd datblygu sgiliau newydd. Diolch am anifeiliaid i fwyta ac i gael arian a rhai weithiau i gael cwtch ar y sofffa. Hefyd rwyf am ddiolch am fy nheulu a ffrindiau ardderchog. Diolch am gartref cynnes a hapus. Diolch am ein byd gwych ni.*

*Ond pam yr wyt yn gadael y pethau hyn i ddigwydd? Pam mae pobl Affrica heb ddwr neu ddillad cynnes neu bwyd? Pam ydych chi'n gadael y bobl rhyw ni'n caru i farw. Mae'n effeithio bywydau pobl eraill. Mae'n effeithio fi! Ond rwyf wedi gweld pobl yn helpu ei gilydd, yn caru ei gilydd ac yn maddau i'w gilydd.*

*Efallai yn y dyfodol bydd popeth yn newid. Helpwch ni i wella ein byd a chofio i ddiolch am beth sydd gyda ni. Os gwelwch yn dda gallwch chi, Dduw, edrych ar ôl fy modryb sydd wedi marw? Diolch yn fawr. Os oes unrhyw beth rwyf yn gallu helpu gyda dwedwch.*

*Diolch eto am wrando ac am ein caru,*  
Eva.

### **Clwb Sul / Sunday Club**

We welcome six new members to the Sunday Club. They are Leia Rose, Oscar and Ellie Mai, Courtney and Kenzie, and Tia. It is such a joy to see them running in on a Sunday. Many thanks to their families for being so supportive of the Club. Our next family service will be held on Easter Sunday morning when the children will take part in our traditional Easter Egg hunt.

Rydym yn croeshawu chwech aelod newydd i'r Clwb Sul ac yn gobeithio'n fawr y byddant yn mwynhau gyda ni. Peth llawen iawn i ni yw gweld nhw'n rhedeg i fewn ar y Sul â gwen lydan ac rhyw ni'n diolch o galon i'r teuluoedd am fod mor gefnogol. Bydd ein gwasanaeth deuluol nesaf ar fore Sul y Pasg pan gynhelir yr helfa wyau Pasg arferol.

**Côr Meibion Dathlu Cwmtawe**  
**Arweinydd: Conway Morgan**  
**Cyfeilydd: David Lyn Rees**

**Grand American Tour Concert**  
**Cyngerdd Mawreddog Taith yr**  
**UDA**

**Capel y Babel Chapel**

Ffion Haf

Helen Gibbon

Finley Bizzell- Browning, Luke James &  
Sion Matthey

**Nos Sadwrn/ Saturday April/**  
**Ebrill 9fed**

**7pm £10**

**Elw tuag at gronfa'r Capel/**  
**Proceeds towards Chapel funds**

### **Bethania**

Rydym yn drist iawn fod Capel Bethania wedi cau ei drysau am y tro olaf. Mae perthynas agos wedi bod rhwng Babel a Bethania dros nifer o flynyddoedd a gyda Heol Dŵr fe fu Babel a Bethania yn ofalaeth dan sawl gweinidog.

Yn dilyn y cau swyddogol ym mis Tachwedd derbyniwyd sawl item oddi yno sef Cwpan Cymun, Cwpan fedydd a llinellau arbennig ar gyfer y pulpud a'r bwrdd Gymun. Cysegrwyd y rhain mewn gwasanaeth Gymun ar Chwefror 21ain gan ein gweinidog. Roedd y Cwpan Fedydd wedi ei rhoi gan deulu ar agoriad y capel yn 1902. Mae'n chwith meddwl fod y capel bellach wedi cau.

Following the closure of Bethania in November, we have received a number of items from the chapel which were very special to the members there, namely the Chalice, a Christening bowl, a Communion table runner and a pulpit lectern fall. These items were dedicated by our Minister at the last Communion Service on February 21<sup>st</sup>. There has been a close association with Bethania for many years. Together with Heol Dŵr we formed a pastorate for many years. The Christening bowl was a gift to commemorate the opening of the Chapel in 1902.





Mike was ordained on 14/09/68, when he was three months short of his twenty second birthday. His, then, claim to fame was that he was the youngest ordained minister in Britain. He was certainly a very youthful pastor and the nickname given him, five years earlier, when he had begun to preach – “The boy in the pulpit” – remained an apt description. I was younger still, a good six months younger. It must have seemed to people living in the neighbourhood that the local church had invited children to live in the manse!

In point of fact, the pastorate, known as the Frithelstock Group of Baptist Churches, consisted of four chapels – Frithelstock, Caute, Newton St Petrock and Tythecott – which were situated in rural North Devon. Mike had preached there in February 1968 and did so again – ‘with a view to a call’ – the following month. On this occasion the church members asked that I accompany him – presumably to ensure themselves that I was an acceptable partner for their minister. I have always found this a strange practice. Had Mike applied for a job as a plumber or teacher his wife would not have been expected to attend an interview with him! It was almost as if the church wanted ‘two for the price of one’ and saw ministry as a ‘joint’ enterprise. Such a prospect terrified me. I have never been an ‘up front’ type of person and far prefer to remain in the background, exercising a supportive role, but from a distance.

I well remember that visit. I received a lovely welcome and the people could not have been kinder. Nevertheless, the weekend was an awful strain and I was so relieved when it was over. We were taken back to the railway station, by two elderly church members who asked me, during the car journey, if I was looking forward to being a minister’s wife. I replied that I was looking forward to being the wife of Mike Shephard! It was not the most tactful of answers but I had spoken the truth. I was marrying the man. Not his job. I wanted to be a person in my own right and not become an extension of my husband’s personality. I am not certain that the members of the Frithelstock Group really understood my predicament. I was twenty one years old. I was somewhat shy and was lacking in confidence. I shunned the spotlight and yet, paradoxically, was about to marry a man whose doings could not be anything less than public.

One incident stands out in my memory. There had been a sacred concert in the Frithelstock Chapel followed, inevitably, by tea and cakes. This was my first time in church since the birth of our oldest child, David, who was only a matter of months old. I didn’t have the energy for mixing with the crowds but made myself useful, in the kitchen, washing up. One of the older women came up to me and said: “*What are you doing here? You should be out there, talking to your people.*” I wanted to say that they were not my people. They were my husband’s people. Instead I bit my tongue and said nothing. I just went home angry and upset. I think that is one of the hardest things about being the spouse of a minister. Biting one’s tongue; never giving offence; wanting to speak out but having to suppress one’s feelings; accepting unkind barbs and criticisms – often directed at one’s husband – and being unable to respond. It cannot be healthy and yet is part and parcel of church life.

I would hate to give the impression that the Frithelstock experience was an unhappy one. The people were so friendly and welcomed us, at every opportunity into their homes. One very special family turned up, on a tractor, with items of furniture which we painted white and used to start furnishing a very empty manse. We were so proud of ourselves and, indeed, of our home. We would return home on occasion to find a load of logs in the woodshed or a tray of eggs on the doorstep – kindnesses which helped keep the wolf from the door.

Mike’s ministry, moreover, was appreciated and people recognised, even then, that ‘the boy in the pulpit’ had a gift, not only for preaching, but for working with young people and for making links with people who were not habitual churchgoers. On the whole, the three years spent there were fulfilled ones and we remember the people with much affection.

Overshadowing our happiness was the problem of money or, rather, the lack of it. We had both come from backgrounds which had been very poor, materially. For us, there was no possibility of financial help from relatives. We were unlikely to receive any kind of inheritance, then or in the future, the truth being that loved ones would have little to leave. Before arriving in Devon Mike had been in college for four years. We had no savings and now had to make ends meet on the princely salary of £675 per year!

To put it bluntly, we struggled. Here is part of the text of a letter sent us by the manager of Lloyds Bank, in Bideford



*Dear Reverend and Mrs Shephard,*

*To save you the embarrassment of dishonour, I am writing to inform you that you are overdrawn in the sum of some ninety pounds. Please see me at your earliest convenience to discuss how this debt is to be repaid.*

It was at this point that Mike decided that full time ministry made no economic sense and that, henceforth he would seek full time, secular, employment and, if possible, serve the churches voluntarily or in return for a greatly reduced stipend. In time he would retrain as a probation officer and, for forty five of his forty eight years in ministry, would exercise a dual role.

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As I look back at the experiences we have shared I think again of the question asked of me shortly before we married. Are you looking forward to being a minister's wife? These years on it needs to be phrased differently. Have I enjoyed being a minister's wife?

I find that a difficult question to answer as it provokes all kinds of emotions. My first reaction, if I am honest, is to reply in the negative.

(1) For one thing is the fact that I have spent forty eight years married to an exceptionally busy man. Mike has combined the work of a full time Probation Officer and Family Court Adviser with the work of part time Christian Ministry. The phrase 'part time' is misleading in that he has attempted to achieve as much 'part time' as many ministers do 'full time.' I can't think of a single occasion when church members advised him to "slow down" or to "do less", the expectation being that his presence at activities was essential. Unlike full time ministers, he has never been offered, let alone taken a sabbatical. At times, it has seemed as if he has had two full time jobs working seven days a week, year in and year out.

I doubt if anyone fully appreciates how much effort Mike puts into his church work. He makes preaching look easy but that is because he spends so much time in preparation. He doesn't memorise his sermons but does become so familiar with the content that he can deliver them without reliance on notes. I am his worst critic but would have to say that his preaching is always fresh and relevant to today's world. There have been times, over the years, when I have toyed with the idea of attending a different church and having 'my own' minister. If such an idea has not been sustained it is because I have experienced so many sermons, preached by others, as trite and dated.

Nor has Mike been content, simply to lead worship. He has always tried to be a good pastor and, additionally, to engage with the community. He has had a part in setting up Drop-In Centres on church premises, with the Friendship Centre at Babel being the fourth such initiative. When in Tredegar he succeeded in encouraging the Hospice of the Valleys to establish a clinic in the church building. He encouraged another church to set up a food bank.

When he was minister at the Baptist Church in Llamas Street, Carmarthen he became conscious that this "thinking person's church" demanded a ministry that kept abreast of current theological thinking. Thus it was that he embarked upon a six year course of distance learning which led to an Oxford honours degree in theology, this being additional to his work as a minister and probation officer. As if that wasn't enough he also completed two London Marathons, fifteen half marathons, the Snowdon 'Three Thousands,' North West Challenge and Three Peaks – all for charity.

What I am trying to say is that I have always had to share Mike with others; as, too, have our children and grandchildren. We have had to accept the 'leftovers' both in regard to his time and energy. We have never begrudged this and, speaking for myself, I would do the same thing again. I was nevertheless so glad when he decided, quite recently, that he was beginning to feel 'preached out' and intended to bring his retirement forward, to the end of May this year. In fact, I gave a huge cheer! I am cheering still!

(2) If I have been less than happy as the wife of a minister it is because of the kind of man I married. Mike, when all is said and done, can be controversial. He has always been a theological liberal in a denomination which, increasingly, has become evangelical and conservative. He has said, openly, that he wants the words "GOD DOES NOT WRITE BOOKS" inscribed on his gravestone.

He encourages dignity in worship when so many churches are pursuing worship styles with which he feels very uncomfortable. When the, so called, "Toronto Blessing" broke out he would argue that "it had nothing to do with God."

His vision has always been of an inclusive church which welcomes people of great faith and no faith. He



preaches acceptance for all people, including those whose sexuality is lesbian and homosexual. He hates homophobia and views everyone as a child of God. He believes that the words 'must' and 'believe' are incompatible. He teaches that we need only believe that which is true for us.

I have lost count of the hate mail which has been delivered to the house over the years and would have to say that some "Christians" are unworthy of that name. To see one's husband castigated by them is painful and there have been times when I would have wished for a less stressful existence.

(3) I certainly have not found churches easy places to be in. They can be very intolerant places. People can become easily offended with the proverbial "walking on eggshells" being an apt description of church life. I also feel that 'familiarity can breed contempt' and that many ministers do not get the respect they deserve. I think that people are overly quick to criticise a minister's deficiencies and are slow to offer encouragement and praise. Some of God's saints, as they say, can be pains in the neck.

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All this said, there have been many highs in church life which have compensated, if only in part, for all the lows.

When Mike left Devon he became minister of two churches in Radnorshire – one at Crossgates and the other at Bwlchysarnau. At Rock, he officiated at the first baptism that had been held in the building for some twenty years. When the floor boards which covered the baptistery were removed, it was discovered that it had not been emptied since the last baptism. The water was reasonably clear, save for the remains of a 100 or so drowned mice. Mike commented that the rodents had at least died as good Baptists! Bwlchysarnau had no baptistery so Mike had the privilege of baptising some seven young people in a nearby stream. It was a memorable occasion.

We remain close to friends, now very elderly, at the Rock Chapel though have lost contact with the church at Bwlchysarnau. Our third child, Lawrence Andrew, is buried there so our link with that place will be lifelong.

I would have to say that the thirteen years spent at Lammas Street, Carmarthen, were especially fulfilling. It was during that period that 'Carols by Candlelight' became a feature of the churches' witness. The 'Drop-In' Centre came into being. The Christmas Day lunch was initiated. Club 2000 was established. We slept out in cardboard boxes to raise money for the homeless. We participated in outdoor activities with "Penyfan" becoming a second home. There was considerable growth, numerically, with the congregation growing from eighteen, to close on one hundred.

It was Lammas Street that provided Mike with the opportunity to get back into ministry after his "wilderness years."

It was in the 1980s that he had experienced a crushing loss of faith which resulted in him staying from church for over seven years. When he began to preach again it would be as "a doubter to doubters" – an emphasis which the English Baptist Church, for the most part, welcomed and encouraged.

Numerical growth would, of course, bring problems, particularly as some who joined the church sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to change the tolerant and inclusive stance which characterised the fellowship there. A letter from one aggrieved couple read: *"Dear Mr Shephard, you are leading your people into a lost eternity. We will be praying for your salvation. Yours in Christian Love ....."*

Such letters deserve to be ignored and deserve no further comment.

Lammas Street remains an all-inclusive fellowship and fully deserves a special place in our hearts.

We have happy memories, too, of our time at Memorial Baptist Church, Swansea and we have friends there still. Once again there was numerical growth and much to encourage.

The one unhappy memory relates to an approach, made by the Jewish Synagogue, in Swansea, to share our building with us. Such an approach was 'unheard of' and we wanted, so much, to make a positive response. Our Jewish friends would worship on a Saturday. We would meet on a Sunday. There would be no question of the cross being removed. It was situated to the west of the church. The Jewish congregation faced east to pray – in the direction of the 'everlasting light' which would be situated on the wall in front of them. It was simply a matter of turning the chairs round. Both congregations would serve the community together. We would invite schools onto the premises and introduce them to the two faiths which, in any event, had a common root. What an opportunity! Most, if not all of the congregation were in favour of the move.

Then came the opposition from the Baptist Association, locally, and from the Baptist Union, nationally. The Trust Deeds made a predictable appearance which decreed that the building could only be used for Christian



Worship. We were threatened with being excluded from the Union. Once again, inevitably, came the hate mail and cruel comments.

Our consequent failure to welcome the Jews was extremely painful and several people, ourselves included, shed tears of regret for the resultant decision. We were wrong not to have stood up to those who, in effect, were bullies.

On the positive side Memorial remains a welcoming, if small congregation, where all shades of belief are encouraged. It is a church that deserves to thrive but, is unlikely to do so, given the conservative climate within the churches generally. The Jewish Synagogue, it is sad to note, has now closed.

Mike became minister of S\*\*\*, Tredegar, in 2007. It was a hard, difficult church, resentful of change and content to be a 'preaching centre' rather than a welcoming family.

The root of the problem was that the retiring minister had a change of mind and, without any consultation with Mike, arranged with the church officers, to remain involved in the ministry of the church. It became impossible to move the church in new directions and Mike terminated his ministry, under a huge cloud, after only two years.

Our time at S\*\*\* was an agony and it would have been easy, at that point, to have walked away from churches for good. We had never experienced such unkindness in our lives and both of us, I think, were close to breakdown.

If I criticise denominational structures it is that so little support is offered to ministers in crisis. There is no union to whom the minister can turn. There is no complaint or grievance procedure available and the 'powers that be' are visible only by their absence. In consequence, ministers and their family are very susceptible to breakdown and marriages are placed under enormous strain. When Mike asked an area minister, responsible for Welsh churches, to intervene he was met with a response of, "I don't want to get involved, it would make me ill." Enough said.

Mike, however, was determined that good should come out of bad and accepted an invitation to reopen another church in Tredegar as a 'Church from Scratch.' Saron, for want of a congregation, had closed some months before. The structure was dilapidated and resources were limited.

That said, Mike had considerable goodwill within the community, including from non-churchgoers who said that they would attend church if he became minister there.

Slowly, but surely, the church began to prosper and it remains a work in progress.

Of all churches, Saron, being born of heartbreak, is the most special to us.

Never before had we experienced so much love in a church fellowship and, looking back, Mike and I would describe those early months as the closest thing to heaven we had ever experienced. If only churches could sustain that level of love and commitment there is no limit to what could be achieved.

Mike became minister of Babell in 2012. I say 'minister' but he was appointed, in effect, as a lay leader. For some reason the Welsh Presbyterian Church felt unable to recognise Mike as a minister, this despite his long and effective service to the churches. Mike said that it did not really matter. Jesus had been a layman. The early church began as a lay movement and only lost its way when it sought power and pride of place.

The chapel itself has always recognised Mike as a minister and his time here has been happy and productive. We have particularly valued the musical tradition of the church and the quality of the singing is very high. Some of the loveliest people we have ever met are part of the Babell family and the friendships made here will endure.

Mike would have liked to remain as minister long enough to help establish Babell Zion Newydd but knows that it is time to retire to the back pews and take a well-earned break from church life.

One question remains. Would I do it all again? Knowing what I know now, would I willingly agree to marry a minister? Has it been worthwhile?

I think I would answer now, as I made answer all those years ago. I have been more than happy to have married Mike Shephard, but am not too certain that I have enjoyed his 'affair' with the Christian Church. I cannot wait for him to become a retired minister and to relinquish responsibility for any church. Health permitting, our most contented years are likely to lie ahead. I say, "Roll on 22<sup>nd</sup> May!"

With love,  
Gwen



## OLD MEASURES

Do you remember when we were in school learning our times tables by rote? If so, you too will recall chanting other measurements such as lengths, areas etc. Did you wonder where some of these measurements came from? Well some of them are very interesting. In ancient times, for example, length was determined as follows:

Tri hvd heidden, un modvedd,	Three barley corn lengths, one inch
Tair modvedd, un palvod,	Three inches, one palm
Tair palvod, un troedvedd,	Three palms, one foot
Tair troedvedd, un cam,	Three feet, one pace
Tri cham, un naid,	Three paces, one leap
Tair naid, un grwn,	Three leaps, one ridge, or land
Mil grwn, or tir, un milltir.	One thousand lands, one mile.

Having got that far how would land areas be defined? Not surprisingly, it was based on the yoke of oxen used to plough the land and was defined in the ancient constitution of Wales. For example in the case of a long yoke which measured 16 feet, then the length of an acre was 16 yokes and the breadth 2 yokes. Interestingly, neither meadow, pasture, nor wood land were included in the acre (erw); for only the arable ground was measured in this way.

However, having established an area measure of an acre (erw) larger land areas could be described. Wales was originally divided into royalties or lordships, often varying in the number. However, these royalties and lordships were generally subject to one or the other of the three principalities of Gwynedd, Powys, and Deheubarth; or North Wales, Powys, and South Wales.

A major district in these Principalities was termed a Cantrev, which was similar to the English Hundred. The Cantrev constituted of a certain number of subdivisions based on an acre (erw) as follows:

4 Erw, acre	1 Tyddyn, (tenement)
4 Tyddyn /16 Erw	1 Rhandir, (district)
4 Rhandir /64 Erw	1 Gavel, (bailiwick)
4 Gavel /256Erw	1 Trev, (township)
4 Trev	1 Maenol, (manor)
12 Maenol & 2 Trev /50 Trev	1 Cwmwd, (association)
2 Cwmwd /100 Trev	1 Cantrev, (hundred towns)

Of course all this has faded into antiquity. Latterly even our quirky imperial system of measurement, that we were taught in school, has been superseded by a metric system. Sadly, the younger generation will never have to grapple with the concept lengths in chains and furlongs or areas measured in rods, poles and perches. Perhaps the romance has disappeared in an age where measurement can be made using lasers and counting in tens is the order of the day.

Trevor Lloyd

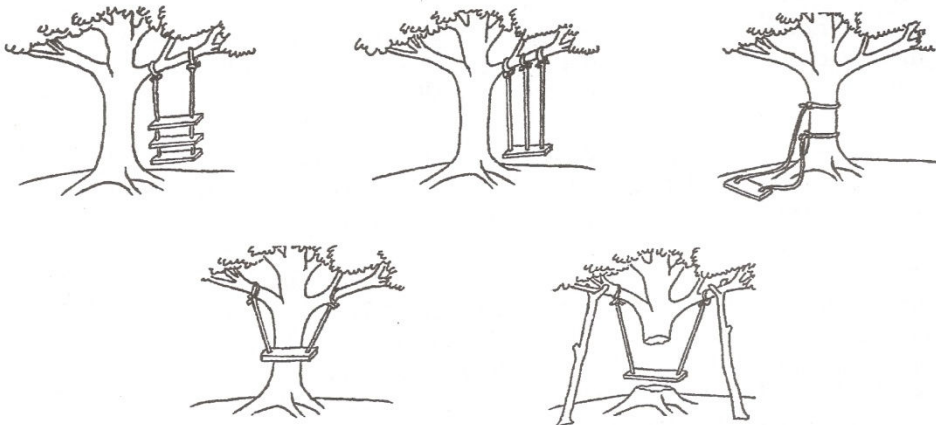
### QUAYLE-ISMS

Dan Quayle, who was vice president of America some years ago, became famous by putting his foot in his mouth almost every time he opened it to say something meaningful. Here are eight examples:

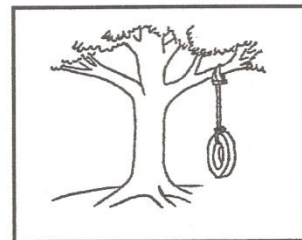
1. One word sums up the responsibility of any vice - president, and that word is 'to be prepared'.
2. Solutions are not the answer.
3. If we do not succeed, we run the risk of failure.
4. A zebra cannot change its spots.
5. The best thing about the rain forests is that they never suffer from drought.
6. I am sorry that I cannot address the people of Latin America in their own language - Latin.
7. We are going to have the best educated Americans in the world.
8. I love California - I practically grew up in Phoenix.

### THE 'KISS' PRINCIPLE

During a recent seminar of the leading churchmen in Wales there was a workshop to promote improved communication between the ministers and their parishioners. To test their skills a young lad set them a problem:- could they design a simple garden swing to be hung from a tree in his garden. The results produced were imaginative but far from practical shown by the five examples below.



Needles to say the young lad was not greatly impressed by the combined efforts of the great and good. Thankfully a chum of his suggested he ask Mike Shephard if he would consider drawing up a plan for a simple garden swing. Mike submitted this design which the young lad thought was brilliant, his father quickly built it and the design became a practical reality in no time.



KISS - Keep it simple, stupid xxxxxxxx



**THE COMING QUARTER**

**MARCH 6/ 2pm** Minister Communion  
**13/ 2pm** Pastor J Morgan

**Saturday March 19<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. Final Service at Zion Chapel, Carmarthen**

**MARCH 20<sup>th</sup> 2pm** Minister-Distribution of palms

**Thursday March 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm. Holy Communion/ Foot Washing**

**MARCH 27 10.30** Minister/ Easter Inauguration of  
Babell Zion Newydd Church.  
Holy Communion

**APRIL 3 2 pm** Pastor J Morgan  
**10 10.30** Minister Communion  
**17 10.30** Minister  
**24 10.30** Minister

**MAY 1 10.30** Mr Hywel Hughes  
**8 10.30** Minister Communion  
**15 2 pm** Mr Hugh Waddell  
**22 10.30** **Minister's final Service**

**May 29 2 pm** Pastor John Morgan

**Summer Newsletter.** This will be printed at the end of May. It would be lovely if everyone could submit a brief word of farewell/ greeting to Gwen and Mike as they leave us. Other of Mike's churches did this in the past and the newsletters are much treasured still. Please let Helen have them by the middle of May. You don't have to be a member of the church to include a greeting. You don't even have to attend church.