

Babell Chapel/Capel y Babel Pensarn

Summer newsletter

Cylchlythyr

Haf 2015

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Thanks to Mike Shephard for permission to do this.



Online at

<http://www.llangunnor.net>

Dear Friends

“The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.”

So speaks the Psalmist. Was he right?

I am quite sure, in my own mind, that anyone who made such a dogmatic assertion would merit the label “fool.” I do not say this because I am prejudiced in the direction of the opposite opinion, but because anyone who invents a sentence containing a universal negative should realise that it cannot possibly be proven. Robinson Crusoe could say, “There are people on this island.” He could never have logically said, “There are no people living on the island.” How could he know what existed behind every hill and tree? He could not have searched every nook and cranny where a person might lurk. If, having done so, he went to bed believing the island to be uninhabited a man might arrive during the night. A negative, in short, cannot be evidenced.

Similarly, it is illogical for a man or woman to look up into the night sky, and say, “In the vast universe, part of which is stretched before me, I can affirm dogmatically that there is no God.” It is permissible for them to say, “I don’t think there is.” They are free to say that, “The word ‘God’ has no meaning for me.” But the complete, dogmatic assertion they cannot make. If they do so they are demonstrating, by the very absence of logic, that the description of ‘fool’ can be applied to them.

When we come to the agnostic who says, “I do not know if there is a God,” that is a different matter. We should, at the very least, listen to what they have to say and try to understand their lack of certainty.

The attitude of the agnostic has much to teach us. It challenges our glibness; the smug complacency of those who are too apt to say they know, when they can only guess. One encounters them in so many churches today – Christians who believe that they have the truth and have discovered the measure of God. They talk about God and the universe as though the latter were tied up in a neat parcel of transparent cellophane and offered to them by a God whose

nature they can see through, as easily as they can see all that the package contains. To me the universe itself is an unending mystery and, as with God himself, provokes in me a sense of reverent agnosticism.

In order to stimulate further thought here are some quotations which are worthy of consideration. Think about them:

All intelligent faith in God has behind it a background of humble agnosticism.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

I am astonished at the boldness with which people undertake to speak of God

Pascal

Many a humble agnostic, worshipping an unknown God, is nearer to the Kingdom of God than is a theologian confident in his theology. Many an atheist is rejecting false conceptions of God which he assumes to be Christian beliefs about Him. Many an agnostic has a reverence for the unknown God which puts to shame the pride of a superficial dogmatist.

Frederic Greeves

The mistake which 'orthodox' people make is to suppose that they have all the truth and that nothing more can be known.

W.R Matthews

As one goes on, it is the things one doesn't believe, and finds one doesn't have to believe, which are as liberating as the things one does.

Honest to God/ John Robinson

The real breakthrough began when I realised that I had far more in common with the honest agnostic than with the average Christian.

A Free Church Minister/ Honest to God Debate

Consciously, I was religious in the Christian sense, though always with the reservation: 'But it is not as certain as all that.'

C.G. Jung

As I contemplate retirement in September 2016, I think prayerfully of the person who will succeed me as minister. Clearly he or she will have their own approach and that is right. That said, I do hope that my successor will embrace the tolerant attitude that is the hallmark of this church and preserve the openness and breadth which characterises our fellowship.

Above all else, I would plead that there will always be room in this church for a questioning approach to faith and that the doubter will be as welcome as the believer. If I am optimistic about that happening it is because you were so ready, three years ago, to welcome, as minister, a man who described himself as a *CHRISTIAN AGNOSTIC*! I STILL DO!

With all good wishes

MIKE SHEPHARD

FAMILY NEWS

It was my sad task, in April, to officiate at the funeral service of *Eires Roberts*. It was only in January of this year that I had received her into the membership of Babell and the news of her death, being so unexpected, was a shock to us all. Eires was a very special person who was loved by everyone who knew her and her passing, at the age of sixty years, will have left a huge void in the hearts of many. As a minister, I am used to officiating at the funeral services of my friends and am practised in suppressing my emotions in order to perform so difficult a task. On this occasion, I found it hard to do so and remain affected by a sense of loss. Eires had come to love this church, felt accepted, and was very much at home here. In time, her contribution to the church, would have been immense and the thought of 'what might have been' adds to the sense of bereavement that we feel. What then must her family be experiencing? We remember them all at this time. Our thoughts, too, are with Eires' neighbour and closest of friends, Esme, whose personal tribute to Eires will live long in the memory. We wish Eires travelling mercies and a splendid dawn.

Shortly before Eires' funeral I was present at the English Baptist Church, Carmarthen, paying tribute to another friend, Harris George. Not many of us knew Harris as he had been in residential care for some time and, at ninety years of age, had outlived most of his contemporaries. I often say that in every church there are people who act as pastor to the minister. Harris was one such person and his support, during the thirteen years I was minister there, was second to none. Harris would have been mortified to hear me say that he was a "very saintly man" but it was, I feel, an accurate description of him. He was humble, unassuming and slow to speak of his own achievements. Harris never uttered an unkind word about another. Rather, he was quick to praise and encourage. He seldom complained, his favourite phrase being, "I could be better; but I could be an awful lot worse. I have so much for which to be grateful." Thank you for your love and friendship, Harris. It was a privilege to have known you.

A number of friends have been unwell during the past quarter: Edwina Jones has a number of health related concerns. Elizabeth Evans, the mother of Helen and Marian, has spent time in hospital and is now recovering at home. Sybil Hughes, who attends our Friendship Centre, has undergone surgery but is home now and is much improved. Vi Williams is to have surgery in the very near future. Sally Evans is still not at her best and is to have further tests shortly. Mandy Walters continues to receive treatment and her positive attitude is an inspiration to us all. Esme Phillips was unwell for many weeks but is almost back to her old self. Trevor Lloyd fractured a bone in his hand playing Badminton with the resultant incapacity being a source of frustration to him. Keith Anders is often in pain but soldiers bravely on. We wish all these friends well. It is good to see Joy Thomas and Judith Hammond looking so much better.

On a happier note it was my privilege, recently, to welcome Ann Harries into the membership of our church. We are so glad that she feels at home in Babell.

As some come, so others depart for pastures new. We wish Ian and Kelly Davies well as they move to Llanelli – possibly this summer. Their three children, Kian, Ioan and Josh, are members of our Sunday Club and, along with

Ellie-Grace, have made a wonderful contribution to the life of our church. I do hope that they will be happy in their new environment and that they will continue to be involved with a Sunday school locally. We love them dearly and want them to keep in touch. Perhaps they could attend Babel on special occasions!!

It goes without saying that their going will leave a huge void in our numerically small Sunday Club. It is very difficult these days to attract children into the church as so many have other commitments on weekends. Perhaps we need to consider a midweek event for children, though there is then the problem of placing pressure on a small number of, already busy, adult leaders. There is no easy solution to the dilemma but to engage the attention of children without first engaging with the parents seems a contradiction in terms. We are not indifferent to the issue and will continue to discuss possibilities.

Our link with Llangynnor Primary School continues to develop. The latest joint enterprise will take place on Saturday July 4th when four or five staff members, including the headmaster, will travel to Bethesda, North Wales and join us in the Bethesda Zipp Wire Challenge. There will be fifteen of us in total and sponsorship will be equally divided between our Friendship Centre and school projects. The Zipp Wire is a mile long and sliding along it, suspended high above the slate quarries, we will achieve speeds of 60 -100 mph. I can't wait! I have done many things over the years – gliding, parachute jumps, hot air ballooning, abseiling, caving, 24 hour mountain walking marathons and much, much more. I had thought that such folly would diminish in my late sixties but there is no sign of this happening! DO PLEASE SPONSOR US. Every donation, whatever its size, will be greatly appreciated. Incidentally we should think of a name for our group. When we were doing parachute jumps we formed, THE CRAPPY NAPPY CLUB! If you can think of a name for those *daft enough* to do the Zipp Wire please let me know.

Elsewhere in the Newsletter is a report on our May Day Walk which, this year, involved a trek around the Usk Reservoir. Our thanks to Linda Williams for doing the 'write-up' and for being so positive about the experience of getting lost! Joy Thomas and I have agreed to share responsibility for an error, which paradoxically, added to the enjoyment! Helen, with characteristic humour,

suggested that I should bring my retirement forward so that I will not be around to lead you astray next May! There must be a sermon there. Our thanks to Gwyn, by the way, who followed the right route and who, in consequence, spent most of the day on his own!

Our thanks to Charmaine Williams for the seat cushions. They are lovely, Charmaine.

I write this on May 12th and prior to the completion of discussions on the future of the four Presbyterian chapels in Carmarthen – Babell, Bethania, Heol Dwr and Zion. The total membership of all four churches is only 92 and the combined attendance on any given Sunday is less than that. As with so many other churches the fellowships are small and comprise mainly elderly congregations. It is a struggle for them to maintain the fabric, let alone commit to outreach on any meaningful scale. Something must be done and sacrifices must be made.

I do know that the denominational leadership would wish all four congregations to unite with Heol Dwr and worship in the Water Street Chapel which, historically, was the home of Welsh Presbyterianism. One presumes that there would need to be two services on a Sunday, one in Welsh and the other in English, in order to accommodate both languages. This, whilst understandable, would undermine the numerical strength of both congregations and make unity difficult to achieve. The attendance at services would remain small. Bi-lingual services, whilst possible, can sometimes end up pleasing no one and some people report feeling “excluded” when they cannot understand what is being said or sung.

Had this development occurred three years ago it is likely that Babell might well have decided, albeit reluctantly, to accept the envisaged scheme. We were facing an uncertain future at that time and were numerically very weak. Since then we have achieved modest growth and have embraced fundamental change. We have a relatively thriving Friendship Centre and have made progress in forging links with our community. Our building is structurally sound and the worship area has been transformed into a comfortable, multi-purpose environment. In the near future we hope to revamp the toilet area and upgrade the kitchen facilities. We are conscious of the need to grow and are

missionary minded. Some of us, relative newcomers to church life, are happy and settled here and would, possibly, find it difficult to become part of fellowship with which they have no affinity.

It would be wrong of me to pre-empt our discussions and one does not wish to appear inward looking. That said, the argument for retaining our independence is a strong one, prompted not by any desire for self-preservation but, rather by a consideration of what is best for the future of the Christian cause in our immediate area. If we refuse to embrace the proposal there will be scope for putting forward a case for retaining our own identity. The debate will continue and your views are welcome.

In Lent we held a study group which looked at 'Violence in the Bible.' People were invited to comment on the discussion and feedback appears at various points in our newsletter. It was lovely to see one of the members of Heol Dwr, Molly Thomas, joining with us and I am grateful for her feedback:

"I was intrigued by an announcement in the spring edition of Babel Chapel's newsletter about a series of discussion groups to be held in the weeks before Easter. The title of the series was 'Violence and the Bible.'

A number of us gathered in the vestry every week for three weeks and each session was led by the minister, Mike Shephard. He introduced us to this topic in quite a startling fashion which generated lively discussion and some difference of opinions. This set the pattern for the following weeks. Mike led us very skilfully through each session and gave us much to think about.

I shall look forward to the next series and am very glad that I went along to the meetings."

In closing our Family News I would like to thank you for the very understanding way in which you have greeted news of my retirement in September 2016. I will have been in ministry for 48 years by then and, for the most part, have combined ministry with another occupation. This has entailed a seven day working week, year in and year out. I am mentally tired and my mind and body are telling me to slow down. These days they are adding two words to the message. "Or Else!" I think it is time I listened to what is being said.

MFS

SLOW ME DOWN, LORD

Some of the ideas in this poem were inspired by a prayer, in prose form. I came across the poem in a devotional book but the author's name was not given:

Slow me down, Lord!
Ease the pounding of my heart
By the quieting of my anxious mind.
Make me aware that I am but part
Of a larger whole; and to be more kind
With myself. Not all endeavour need start;
Nor reach its end in me.

Slow me down, Lord!
Steady my frantic, hurried pace
With a vision of the slow march of time.
Give me, in the rush of life, space
To consider the everlasting hills; to climb,
In imagination, those heights that have graced
The world from eternity.

Slow me down, Lord!
Break the tension of my hectic days
With the soothing music of the mountain stream.
Let me see its waters wending their way
Calmly, but surely, onwards until dreams
Become reality; giving of themselves, in praise
To that greater sea.

Slow me down, Lord!
Lest I, like a fool, confuse means and ends;
And in my breathless haste, miss out
On those more important things. Let me spend
Time watching the bud open; the plant sprout
Into life; patting a dog; chatting with friends;
Content, not to do, but to be.

Slow me down, Lord!
Make me to be as Tortoise – not Hare;
For the race is not always to the swift,
Hurrying, scurrying – they know not where.
Grant me your stillness. Teach me to lift
My tired eyes upwards in silent prayer –
Until, at last, they see.

Slow me down, Lord!
Help me to hear what the Oak Tree tells –
That it grew great and strong,
Because it grew slowly; and well.
Slow me down, Lord; in my heart I long
To send roots deep into the soil; and dwell
In your serenity.

Mike Shephard ©

CREDO *The following article was written by Patrick Regan and appeared in The Times.*

What do those of us who believe in a good God do in times of suffering? How do we reconcile our experiences with the idea of a loving creator?

The past few years have been agony for my family. First, my eldest daughter was diagnosed with a rare condition that meant her immune system wasn't working properly.

Then my younger daughter was diagnosed with Nystagmus which causes long term difficulties with vision. Meanwhile, I was diagnosed with a degenerative knee condition. Surgeons would have to break my leg in two places and attach a huge, circular, metal frame around it by screwing large pins into, and through, my bones. They would have to repeat the operation for the second leg once I had recovered from the first operation, meaning years of pain and limited mobility.

While we tried to process all of this there was some good news: my wife, Diane, was pregnant with our fourth child. But then my dad was diagnosed with bowel cancer. It was during these difficult weeks that Diane suffered a miscarriage.

I couldn't understand why God would allow this to happen. I run a charity called XLP which works across London with almost 2,000 young people every week, many of whom have been involved in gangs. We want to empower them to make wise lifestyle choices. Having major surgery would take me out of action for months at a time; didn't God care about the young people and the work we were doing?

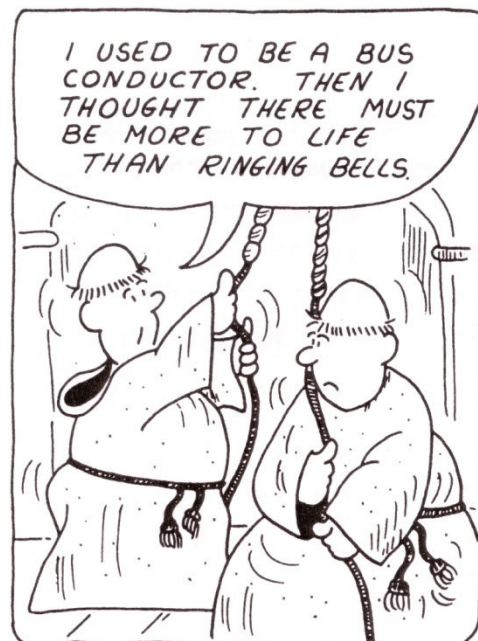
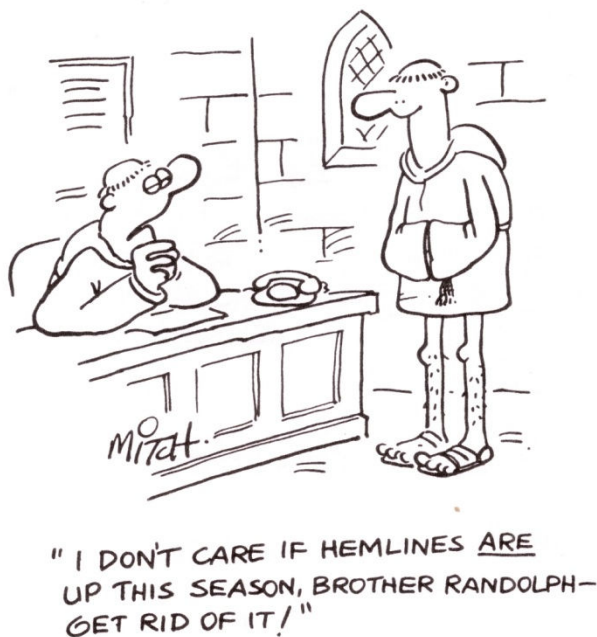
Sometimes, I've wondered if God has abandoned me, and I've felt so angry that I've head-butted a shower door. I don't pretend that I've known the reassuring presence of God in every moment or even claimed to have seen the positives.

We need to be honest. Life is often painful; we can't get away from that fact. Every single one of us has times of feeling weak, fearful, confused, ashamed, miserable, anxious or angry, and it's often as we share those feelings that others feel they can connect with us as they can relate to what we're going through.

While I was unable to work, I shared the pain I was going through in a blog. Many readers commented on how much they appreciated my honesty. By sharing my own confusion and weakness, it opened the door for others to do the same.

When I'm in pain, and I see those around me suffering, I sometimes lose sight of God. But then I realise I need to look again at Jesus in order to find hope. I remember that almighty God was willing to become human, to walk on this earth, and to be put to the most painful death imaginable even though he'd done nothing wrong. He did that so that we would know we are not alone, so that we would know we have a good father who understands our physical and emotional pain. He demonstrated that he's not sitting watching us impassively; he loves us enough to get involved. He doesn't turn away from us when we're angry and confused about the pain we see around us; he invites us to talk to him about it – shout at him about it if we want to. He encourages us to work with him to alleviate what suffering we can and to remember that he is always present in the agonies of our lives. He reminds us that even when our faith gets shaken, he is still with us, holding on tightly and reminding us that we are never alone.

Patrick Regan is the founder of XLP and the author of When Faith Gets Shaken.



Church Secretary's report

March 6th Annual Women's World Day of Prayer

This Service was held in Bethania this year during which Sian took part in the morning English Service and Nan in the afternoon Welsh service. Helen was organist at both services. Women's World Day of Prayer is an international, interchurch organisation which enables us to hear the voices of women, from a different part of the world each year, expressing their hopes and concerns and bringing them before the rest of the world in prayer. This year the service was written by women in the Bahamas and translated into over 1000 different languages and dialects. The theme was taken from John chapter 13 verses 1-17 where Jesus says "Do you know that I have done to you?" It challenges us to demonstrate the same radical unconditional love for others that Jesus showed when he washed the feet of the disciples.

Maundy Thursday

Jesus washed the feet of the disciples on the night of the Last Supper and a re-enactment took place at Babell on Maundy Thursday by Mike when two brave people came forward. It was an uplifting service and the congregation, although small, was double that of last year. We hope it continues.

Easter Sunday

On Easter Sunday we welcomed Mike's family from Leicester and Catherine and the boys to our midst. Mike was spared from arranging the Easter Egg hunt this year, thank goodness! It was decided that all eggs found should be shared equally between the children. But hold on, Mike had to put his oar in. He had a car key hunt due to the fact that he always loses his car keys, well shall we say mislays them? I thought he was joking but true to form he'd hidden his keys so that the adults could have a look around. They weren't very well concealed though!! Helen and Heledd sang All in the April Evening and the children of the Sunday Club led the congregation in an action song. Thank you Mike for the Easter message and to the children for their inter active contribution.

March 31st

On March 31st the general secretary Revd Meirion Morris together with Revds Ifan Roberts Llanddarog, Ian Sims Llandeilo and Llanelli and Mr Neil Poulton met with the elders to discuss the way forward for the Presbyterian chapels of Carmarthen. The four congregations have a total of 91 members and the Properties Board in conjunction with the Historical Society deem that it would be sacrilege to let go of the building at Heol Dwr due to the very fact that this is the very seat of Welsh Presbyterianism. There will be a brief after-service meeting for the Congregation on May 24th to discuss this further.

Ebrill 20fed

Cynrychiolwyd y blaenoriaid gan Sian a fi yn y Cwrdd Dosbarth yn Heol Dwr.

Nodwyd yn y cyfarfod fod cymynrodd o £2000 wedi ei dderbyn trwy ewyllys y diweddar Mrs Ena Wilkins yn ddiamod. Yn dilyn cyfnod o bedair mlynedd gan yr Ysgrifennydd presennol Mr Vaughan Salisbury cytunodd Helen i gymryd yr ysgrifenyddiaeth am flwyddyn.

Dyddiadau i'r dyddiaduron:

Mehefin 20fed: Dydd Sadwrn
taith ddirgel y dosbarth.

Cysyllter gyda Emyr Williams neu
Helen Gibbon

Mehefin 28ain Gwyl Hirddydd haf:
5.30 pm yn y parc. Fe fydd y
gwasanaeth yn cael ei chynnal yn y BIG
TOP gan fod y syrcas yn y dref.

Cyfarfod nesaf y Dosbarth

Yn Ty Hen ar Orffennaf 6ed.

April 20th

Sian and Helen represented Babell at the circuit meeting held In Heol Dwr. It was noted that Babell has received the sum of £2000 as a legacy from the estate of the late Mrs Ena Wilkins Wynros.

Helen has also taken on the office of circuit secretary from Mr Vaughan Salisbury who has served the circuit for four years.

Dates for the diary

June 20th: Saturday Mystery
tour:

Please contact Emyr or Helen for information

June 28th: Sunday at 5.30pm a
Special Summer service for the circuit in the Park and this time in the BIG TOP. The circus is in town. All arranged by Revd Beti Wyn. Plis dewch i gefnogi

May 9th

The Annual Summer Coffee Morning and stalls was held for the last time at the Myrddin Day centre. The Centre will be moving down to the new Argel building in Johnstown in June. We wish to thank the Council for allowing us to hold our Coffee Mornings in such a central location where links have been made over the years with the townspeople. We are grateful to Nan for organizing the events and the team she has behind the scenes every time. Thank you one and all. This time the proceeds of £370 will be divided between the Nepal Earthquake disaster fund and chapel funds. All May's loose collection will also go towards the disaster fund. Remember that Christian Aid week starts on May 10th. Thank you all street collectors.

Yn y prynhawn yn y capel cynhaliwyd Oedfa bendithio Cymdeithasfa'r De. Parch Geraint Davies oedd yn llywydd a'r Parch Carwyn Arthur yn traddodi'r neges. Dyma'r tro cyntaf i fi, Sian a Nelda fod mewn oedfa dan nawdd y Weinidogaeth Iachau.

Roedd hi'n brofiad emosiynol iawn i weld cymaint yn mynd ymlaen i gael arddodiad dwylo dros eu hunain neu dros gydnabod mewn angen gweddi.

Flower display

We forget that our Minister has hidden talents which seem to sprout up from time to time. Who would have thought that we would have such a display of lovely daffodils, tulips and pansies this spring. Esme remarked one Sunday that Mike's tulips were even better than what she had seen on tour in Holland. Thank you Mike for preparing such an inviting and welcoming sight at the chapel gates.



Lenten Discussion

Pat writes

During the season of Lent this year the Revd Mike Shephard led a series of reflections and discussions on a variety of topics. A small group of members and friends of Babell dipped their toes into a vast sweep of historical references and philosophical perspectives based on violence and oppression of others in the Bible. A cosy or comfortable journey it was not, but the emotions stirred by far off cruelties and unfairness were soon related to the sorry state of society in the 21st century.

A question was posed along the lines – “How could a kind and gracious God [as seen through the actions of our loving saviour] have allowed the flood to wipe out huge tracts of humanity and wildlife?” Parallels were drawn with current day disasters- and now, as then, no easy, glib answers were found.

The issues surrounding child abuse were triggered by a reflection on Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac. The lasting psychological scars of terrifying ordeals suffered by children and young people were touched upon. How depressing to realise that seemingly ancient events in a far off time and culture are still relevant as cruelty towards the young and vulnerable is still happening today.

The position of women in society was another hotly debated topic. We wondered how it was, that when the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is revisited, the one

character who is remembered, berated and admonished is Lot's wife. Little mention is made of the actions of men in the society which has brought retribution.

In a similar way other references were explored about the treatment of women. When visitors or foes called, householders preferred to give up their daughters so the callers 'could do with them what they willed' rather than give up useful much valued male members of staff. Women were seen as dispensable, disposable, of little value and could be replaced if necessary.

Through the long perspective of history and different cultures it's difficult for us to judge the rights and wrongs of the eternal triangle of Abraham, Sarah, his wife and Hagar the servant girl. God had promised Abraham he'd be the founder of a "great nation" and as Ishmael, Hagar's son was the first born it may have been assumed he would carry the mantle on. God's Word came to be fulfilled when Sarah delivered Isaac.

Sadly the bitterness, jealousy and hostility of events in pre-history still resonate today in the Middle East.

Mike tirelessly stresses that our chapel should be a broad church, welcoming and non-judgemental. We should care about the outcast, the oppressed and vulnerable. People are equal and should be respectfully treated as such.

In our reflections we found no easy, quick answers to thorny questions posed by events in history or crucially by today's headlines. One thing we know- the church must stand by what is right.

This prayer by Frank Colquhoun seems to sum up our feelings.

Prayer for Social justice

Lord, you have called your church to shine as light in the midst of a dark and needy world: bless and strengthen it in its testimony in every land for justice, truth and freedom.

May it bring help and hope to the poor and the powerless, to the outcast and the oppressed.

May it be a bold and fearless witness in the face of tyranny and wrong.

May it never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, but point to Him as the liberator of mankind, the source of life, and giver of peace.

We ask this in His name.

Amen

Helen writes

During Lent this year Mike held three sessions on 'Violence and the Bible'. I must admit, I wasn't prepared for what I had to read out aloud during the session. The content of some of the Bible passages we read was quite frightening and reminded us of the attitude in those times towards women, people on the edge of society and those who were not socially accepted. I personally believe that God is speaking to us through the scriptures to get our act together, for, when he created the world he saw that everything was good. Even man was good. What happened next was that temptation got the better of man and respect for one another quickly went out the window. The New Testament Gospels make it plain that Jesus came to show us the example of good once again – the goodness that was there at the beginning and of that we need to be reminded time and time again as we deal with each other in all of life's different spheres. The New Testament story rises above prejudice, race, language, cultural differences, and teaches us to treat one another as we ourselves

would want to be treated. Thank you Mike for opening up the scriptures once again and giving us food for thought.



Neges wrth Beti Wyn. Dewch i gefnogi

Emyr Williams

A familiar face at the Friendship Centre is our friend Emyr Williams from Ty Hen. We congratulate Emyr on his recent appointment as an associate in the ministry with Revd Ian Sims Llandeilo and Llanelli. Dymunwn bob bendith arnat yn y gwaith Emyr a diolch i ti am dy gefnogaeth bob amser.

Welsh Classes

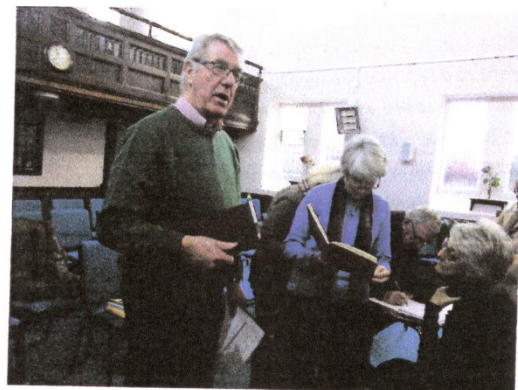
Welsh classes continue every Thursday morning with Bronwen Wilkins at the helm keeping control



Mike is not happy again. Mutations are so pointless!



Wait a moment! I need an explanation for this!



"Well I'm off, this future perfect lark has gone on too far. Hwyl fawr!"

Bank Holiday Walk Around Usk Reservoir



Some Babell Chapel members (and friends) followed Babell tradition and celebrated Bank Holiday Monday (May 4th) with a walk – this year around Usk Reservoir – Lee, Mike, Siân, Suzanne, Helen, Gwyn, Charmaine, Joy, Linda and Mali! We travelled in convoy from Llandeilo and arrived at the reservoir, enthusiastically looking forward to our walk. The weather was favourable, although rather cold – with clothing varying from short sleeves to suitable for the North Pole!

Mike and Joy were familiar with the area and were ready to guide us around the reservoir – the views were lovely. As Gwyn had brought his bike, he was soon way ahead and out of sight and before long, there was a fork in the path – we were assured that it was impossible to go straight on and duly turned right, up the track and through the forestry (without Gwyn whom we lost for the next two hours)! The walk through the trees was scenic and leisurely with plenty of chatter and appreciation of our surroundings until the wide track disappeared and we were left wondering where next with everyone suddenly feeling hungry!



We followed a narrow, muddy path signposted for the Physicians' Well until suddenly, we were out on the mountain, with no reservoir in sight!

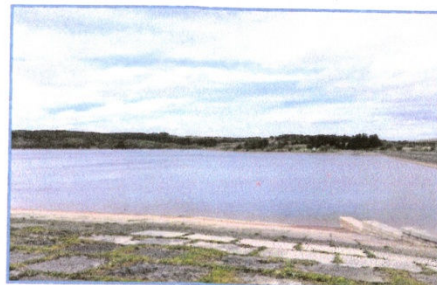


Thank goodness for the map app on the phone which led us back on track towards the end of the forestry and the reservoir. We had a very pleasant tramp across the mountain with a picnic stop, our first lunch with the main path almost in sight.



As we drew closer to the trees, there was a cyclist in view – Gwyn? But although we shouted and shouted there was no response. After reaching the main path on the wrong side of the fence, we made it through the mud and over the stile to the tarmac and before long, Gwyn appeared. Within minutes we were sitting down to our second lunch, sitting comfortably next to the reservoir – the reservoir views at last! Mike enjoyed a snooze. The sun was shining and the end of the journey was nigh.

A few miles further, and we were back in the car park, agreeing that we'd had a great day out, with the added bonus of a walk on the mountain. Thank you very much, Mike for arranging this and inviting friends of Babell on the journey. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed a very pleasant six and a half miles.



Taith Gŵyl y Banc i Gronfa Ddŵr Wysg



Yn ôl arfer Capel Babell, trefnwyd taith gerdded i aelodau'r Capel (a ffrindiau) Ddydd Llun Gŵyl y Banc, Mai 4ydd. Daeth criw ohonom ynghyd a chwedd yn Llandeilo er mwyn dilyn ein gilydd i fyny at y gronfa ddŵr. Roedd y tywydd yn ffafriol er yn oer, er bod gwisgoedd pobl yn amrywio'n fawr iawn – llewys byr / parod at Begwn y Gogledd!

Gyda Joy a Mike yn arwain y ffordd, dechreuom ar ein taith o gwmpas y gronfa gyda golygfeydd hyfryd. Gan fod Gwyn wedi dod â'i feic, cyn hir roedd ymhell o flaen y gweddill ohonom ond wedi ychydig o gerdded, rhaid oedd troi i'r dde gan adael y gronfa ddŵr (a Gwyn) am yr ychydig oriau nesaf! Dringon ni i'r goedwig a dilyn y llwybr trwy'r coed gyda phawb yn mwynhau sgwrsio a



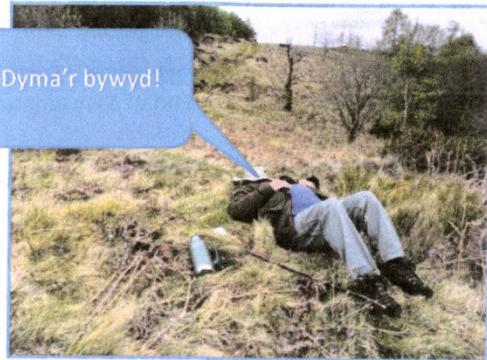
cherdded yn hamddenol braf nes cyrraedd diwedd y llwybr eang. 'Ble nesaf? Pryd gawn ni ginio?'

Dyma ddilyn llwybr cul a mwdlyd i lawr tuag at Ffynnon y Meddygon nes i ni ddod allan i'r mynydd – erbyn hyn doedd dim golwg o gwbl o'r gronfa ddŵr! Diolch byth am yr ap mapiau

ar y ffôn i'n rhoi yn ôl ar ben ffordd i anelu'n ôl am y gronfa ddŵr. Cawsom daith bleserus ar draws y mynydd nes dod at lecyn addas ar gyfer ein picnic – y cinio cyntaf gyda phen draw'r goedwig a'r gronfa ddŵr o fewn cyrraedd.

Wrth nesau at y coed, roedd rhywun ar gefn beic i'w weld yn y pellter – Gwyn? Ond er i ni weiddi a gweiddi, doedd dim ymateb. Wedi stryffaglu trwy'r mwd at y sticil a chyrraedd y llwybr tarmac o gwmpas y gronfa ddŵr, daeth Gwyn i'r golwg a chyn bo hir, roedd pawb yn eistedd yn hamddenol yn mwynhau ail ginio

Dyma'r bywyd!



O diar, pa ffordd?
Well i ni gael
'photo shoot' cyn
penderfynu!

ar lan y dŵr – a Mike yn gorwedd yn y gwair. Erbyn hyn, roedd yr haul yn gwenu a diwedd y daith yn nesau!

Wedi ychydig filltiroedd eto, roeddem yn ôl yn y maes parcio yn cytuno ein bod wedi cael diwrnod i'r brenin, yn enwedig gyda'r daith ychwanegol ar draws y mynydd. Diolch yn fawr iawn i Mike am drefnu ac am wahodd ffrindiau ar y daith. Cafodd pawb amser bendigedig – chwe milltir a hanner pleserus iawn.



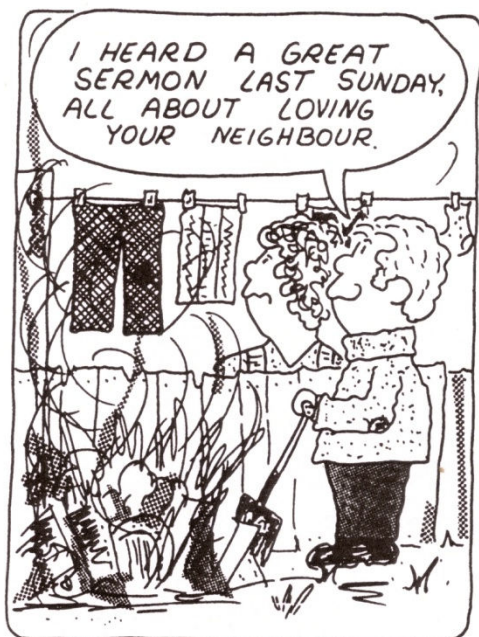
"ONE IS NEARER GOD'S HEART IN A GARDEN THAN ANYWHERE ELSE ON EARTH."

I have loved gardening since I was a very young child. I never find physical labour a chore but, rather, experience it as therapeutic and relaxing. Happiness for me is to barrow in ten tons of soil, create flower beds and rockeries and then to enjoy the beauty, usually with a glass of red wine in my hand. In previous pastorates I have encouraged the congregation to transform the land around the church into community gardens. The most rewarding enterprise was at Saron, Tredegar, where we transformed an overgrown graveyard into a colourful and restful place. With the help of the local probation service we excavated a large pond which is now home to fish and other water based wildlife. The waterfall is particularly attractive. We made the garden into a place of remembrance and people were invited to plant a tree or shrub in memory of loved ones. Some friends purchased a seat as a memorial. It was also a place where friends who had been hurt by life could participate in a 'burial of the past' service, the aim of which was to help them 'move on.' The Saron Garden was a very spiritual place. It still is.

We do not have space for a large garden here. That said we do have room for container gardening. In the autumn we planted winter flowering pansies in pots and under-planted them with tulips. They were a spectacle up until the end of May when they were replaced by a variety of summer flowering plants.

We do have a steep grass bank to the rear of the church which I would like to landscape. It will need terracing and the terraces can then be planted with a variety of bulbs – Daffodils, Rock Hyacinths and Snowdrops which can be left to naturalise. It would also be possible to site containers at various intervals. If you would be interested in donating a frost hardy container, for the front or rear of the church, it would be much appreciated. They could be given in memory of a loved one and be suitably inscribed if you wish. Gifts of bulbs will also be welcome. Let me know what you think. Incidentally, Donna Evans helped me plant the pots this years. Thank you Donna.

MFS



WHO WROTE THIS STUFF?

In the last newsletter I included an imaginary conversation between God and Jeff Loy, author of 'God Worra Yorkshireman.' Jeff, an ordained minister, sees his task as being to reach out to those who are unchurched. He writes provocatively in order to make people think. Here is another 'discussion.'

I was down the library this afters' trying to find a copy of 'Cooking with a Wok' when I get the feeling something's about to kick off.

"What a load of dross!" this voice thunders out.

I spun round like I'd been shot. "Oh it's you God!" I says. "What are you doing in a library; I thought you were all knowing?"

"So did I!" he says, till just now. I was thumbing through this 'ere book. It's drive!"

"What do you mean?" I says. "That's the bible, the word of God. It's your own stuff!"

"Says who?" he snaps.

"Everybody! You know, it's your autobiography!"

"Listen!" he says, the only bits of my stuff in here come to half a page. The rest is a quick guess at history, stories for kids and conjuring tricks!"

"You can't go round saying stuff like that," I says, "you'll empty all the churches."

"I think the clergy have beat me to it," he says. "Are you into magic?"

"Magic?" I says.

"You know, all that 'hocus-pocus', 'now you see it, now you don't' stuff."

"Not really," I says.

"Then you won't fancy this," he says, sticking the Bible back on the 'Miscellaneous' shelf between 'Blasphemy as an Art Form', and 'Breeding Donkeys Part One.'

"Do you know what confuses me?" I says.

"Go on," he says.

"It's all this 'Holy Trinity' stuff. You know, this three in one thing – I mean I'm looking straight at you and I can only see one! So if you're the father, where's the son and holy ghost?"

"You're confused!" he says. "How do you think I feel? They've got me down as the father of my own father, the son of my own son, and a spook!"

"But you are the father of Jesus?" I says.

"Read my lips," he says, "I'm father to the lot of you, in a spiritual way." Then he says, "Talk about something else, I'm sick of this subject."

"Right," I says. "Now then, yes! What about Moses and that burning bush?"

"What about it?" he says.

"Did it happen?" I says. "Did you speak to Moses?"

"What do you think?" he says.

"I don't know what to think," I says.

"Listen!" he says. "If that bush was on fire would I be risking my back-side sitting in the middle of it?"

"Moses reckons you did?" I says.

"Any witnesses?" he says.

"It's all in the Bible!" I says.

"Had we better start this conversation again?" he says. "Which bits didn't you get?"

"Can I ask a really personal question? I says. "Is there really a devil called Satan?"

"What do you think?" he says.

"Well, where did all that come from?" I says.

"It's that lot again," he says. "The church trying to get crowd control by scaring folk to death." He says. They've gone for a bloke with horns, a tail and a toasting fork."

"If it's that far off the mark, how come folk believe it?" I says.

"Listen," he says, "it's the gospel to the gullible. I spotted the knack years ago. Look troubled and carry a book; they fall for it every time."

"I'm looking for the truth," I says.

"We're all looking for something in this world," he says, "even me, but try to keep your eye on what's staring you in the face while you're doing it." Then he looks me straight in the eye. "What are you really searching for, right at this moment?" he says.

"Cooking with a Wok," I says.

"Next aisle," he says, 'Household Management.'" Then he goes to the girl at the desk.

"Can I help?" she says.

"I hope so," he says, dropping a copy of 'The Giant Book of Answers' on the desk in front of her. "I've brought this back, it's overdue."

"Oh," she says, "by how much?"

"A couple of thousand years by the looks of it," he says, as he strolls out with a book on creative gardening.

Jeff Loy

QUIZ and CAWL 2nd March 2015 to celebrate St. David's Day

Nine teams contested this year's quiz. The Babel Angels came ninth (I try to avoid saying last place). Seemingly the Angels didn't care as they had cleverly noted that last year the team at the bottom of the scoreboard picked up a prize. So this year they were pleased to leave with a large tube of Rolo each. Nevertheless they came away with a very creditable 60% success rate of the total questions. The victors were Smyrna Roaders (89%) who were just a few points ahead of the runners up, Young Codgers (84%). The winners received a miniature bottle of wine each and obviously enjoyed themselves so much they actually donated £20 to the Friendship Centre, for which we are extremely grateful. Mike Shephard provided the prizes for the Young Codgers which was a copy of his book of poems entitled 'Oh, Abraham!' As there were only three players in the team there was a spare copy which I am holding in safe keeping until I've read it!! The remaining teams did very well and were in order of merit - St. Cynnwr WI (82%), Calyspo (81%), The Daffodills (73%), Catwomen (71%), Tîm y Cestyll (70%) and The Leeks (65%).

The vestry was attractively laid out with two long tables with seating either side and with additional seating around the bistro tables. This meant that everyone could sit together during the mid quiz interval and enjoy a traditional Welsh lamb cawl, or a vegetarian version, served with mature cheddar cheese and French sticks. The food was given a ringing endorsement by all and the evening must be considered a success.

To make a successful quiz evening takes a lot of hard work and I must make mention of those who were contributors. After chapel on St. David's Day; Helen, Siân and Linda donned their aprons in my kitchen and set to work peeling a mountain of vegetables to add to the lamb and the wonderful stock made from the bones. Helen had already made a vegetarian cawl so decided that preparing swedes would be her task leaving the others to deal with the rest (in fairness swedes are a tough job). The kitchen was filled with laughter and good humour while we worked. Later we all enjoyed a light supper while the cawl bubbled merrily away. The afternoon of the quiz Siân and Linda laid out the tables while the cawl continued to slowly mature. Later Charmaine took charge of the kitchen for the duration of the quiz and helped by Maisie, Janet, Siân and Nelda, the mountain of washing up was done in short order, and after a quick hoovering the chapel and vestry were spick and span once more. It is worth noting that the meat, vegetables, bread, cheese and quiz prizes were all donated. Thank you all for your generosity.

However, if we consider running the quiz next year there are some aspects which need more detailed attention. Although we prepared food for 50 people, based on last year's turnout, this proved to be a gross over estimate. However none of the food left over was wasted. Based on what we observed this year, 10 teams of 4 would be considered the optimum number in logistical terms. Therefore, I would suggest that in future we establish exactly (as far as possible) who will be attending the quiz and ensure it is not over subscribed. This will allow the convivial seating arrangement in both the chapel and vestry we enjoyed this year to be repeated.

Finally, as I commented last year, when you have so many willing and hard working people backing you, running a quiz is a doddle!!

Trevor Lloyd

A LETTER FROM JOHN GREEN

John is the secretary of the Lammas Street English Baptist Church. Some of the members joined us for a quiz evening recently. We are grateful for John's comments:

A QUIZZICAL LOOK

Lois Dalling, Joy Thomas, Judith Hammond and I were amongst nearly 40 people who took part in a most enjoyable Quiz and Cawl evening at Capel y Babell, Pensarn, at the start of this month to celebrate St. David's Day.

Babell Chapel has recently been transformed both inside and out. The exterior has been painted in such a way that few motorists now drive past without noticing its existence! The very bold and imaginative step has been taken to remove the majority of pews from inside the chapel, with the result that the wide-open central area, comfortable chairs and good quality matching carpet provide a perfect venue – warm, welcoming and homely – not only for worship but also for associated Church events such as music, drama, study and quiz nights!

It was good to renew contact with Rev. Mike Shephard who is fondly remembered as our Minister at Lammas Street from 1987 to 2000. Mike is now Minister at Babell following spells in Swansea and Tredegar, and, mindful that he will be entering his 70th year in November, has announced his intention to retire in 2016. Bearing in mind the adage "You can't keep a good man down!" I anticipate this will be a mere opening gambit in a protracted discussion between Minister and congregation! Poor Mike has been through the mill recently, undergoing painful surgery, but is now happily on the mend.

Anyway, to the quiz! Nine teams paid a mere £10 each to cover the entertainment and a delicious bowl of cawl, a better bargain than anything on offer at Charlies Stores down the hill. Trevor Lloyd the quizmaster controlled proceedings very efficiently (in my experience quizzes can bring out the worst in a certain type of person!), and adjudicated equitably on disputed points such as whether "Rowing" was acceptable for "In which event does the winning team go backwards?" [*correct answer: "tug-of-war"*]. There were questions on legends, language, literature and lovers! The only disappointment was the absence of questions on James Bond films, which had been promised in the Babell Newsletter, a clear case for referral to the Office of Fair Trading.

A bunch of outsiders, the Smyrna Roaders, scooped the first prize, scoring a mighty impressive 78½ out of 87, closely followed by The Young Codgers, the Daffodils, the Leeks and a local W.I. branch. Babell Angels scored 88 [*some results have been changed to avoid embarrassment to the hosts*].

Good relations with our neighbouring churches and chapels are very important to us Baptists, and it was a great pleasure to spend such a convivial evening with friends old and new.

John

PANETTONE BREAD & BUTTER PUDDING

Ingredients pudding:

2 large slices of Panettone, buttered & quartered

125g./4oz. sultanas

30ml./2tbsp. brown sugar

Ingredients custard:

3 large eggs

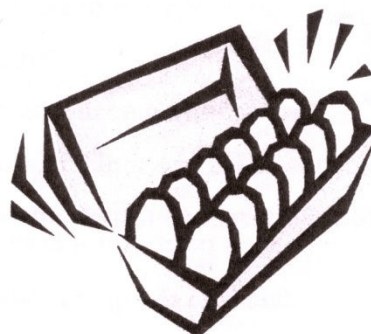
1 egg yoke

600ml./1pt. milk

50g./2oz. caster sugar

Method:

1. Preheat oven 150°C/300°F/Gas2.
2. Arrange the Panettone in an ovenproof dish.
3. Scatter over sultanas & brown sugar; then set aside.
4. Heat the milk to scalding point and allow to cool slightly.
5. Beat the eggs, egg yoke & caster sugar together.
6. Stir mixture into milk.
7. Strain the custard mixture over the Panettone slices.
8. Place the dish into a deep baking tin and half fill the tin with hot water.
9. Place the tin in the preheated oven and cook for 45 minutes or until the custard is set.



Submitted by Trevor Lloyd

**What I remember of the fifties as an adolescent
living in Tenby by Trevor Lloyd**

Pasta had not been invented and Curry was a surname.

A takeaway was a mathematical problem.

A pizza was something to do with a leaning tower.

All crisps were plain; the only choice we had was whether to put salt on or not.

A Chinese chippy was an oriental carpenter.

Rice was a milk pudding, and never, ever part of dinner.

A Big Mac was what we wore when it was raining.

Brown bread was something only poor people ate.

Oil was for lubricating, fat was for frying.

Tea was made in a teapot using tea leaves and never green.

Coffee was Camp, and came in a bottle.

Cubed sugar was regarded as posh.

Only Heinz made beans.

Fish didn't have fingers in those days.

Eating raw fish was called poverty, not sushi.

None of us had ever heard of yoghurt.

Healthy food consisted of anything edible.

People who didn't peel potatoes were regarded as lazy.

Indian restaurants were only found in India.

Cooking outside was called camping.

Seaweed was not a recognised food.

'Kebab' was not even a word never mind a food.

Sugar enjoyed good press in those days, and was regarded as white gold.

Prunes were medicinal.

Surprisingly muesli was readily available, it was called cattle feed.

Pineapples came in chunks in a tin; we had only ever seen a picture of a real one.

Water came out of a tap, if someone had suggested bottling it and charging more than petrol for it they would have become a laughing stock.

**The one thing that we never had on our table in the fifties
... was elbows!!**

Nostalgia

Esme writes

"An Extract from my brother's diary"

When joy turned into tragedy

On March 12th 1950 I was a schoolgirl at a Gwendraeth Valley school. Rugby fans boarded a plane to make their home to Wales after watching Wales win the Triple Crown the day before by beating Ireland 6-3 in Belfast. But jubilation turned into mourning for the whole nation when 80 fans died on the doomed flight as their aeroplane, a Tudor V crashed at Llandow in the Vale of Glamorgan. This was the worst civil air disaster in aviation history at that time. There were only three survivors, a Mr Gwyn Anthony and two others. They were taken to Ward 2 Royal Air Force Hospital St Athan where at the time my late brother John was stationed with the medical team. Mr Gwyn Anthony was one of my teachers at school of whom we all thought so highly. He had the patience of 'Job' – I vaguely remember one end of term report: "*Esme tends to drop her aitches [H].*" I think I still do!

WE ARE SURVIVORS

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio jabs, frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, videos and the pill. We were before radar, credit cards, split atoms, laser beams and ball point pens, before dishwashers, tumble-driers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes ... and before man walked on the moon. We got married first and then lived together (how quaint can you be?). We thought 'fast food' was what you ate in Lent, a 'Big Mac' was an oversized raincoat and 'crumpet' was something we had for tea. We existed before house husbands and computer dating. Sheltered Accommodation was where you waited for a bus.

We were before Day-Care Centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM radio, tape decks, artificial hearts or word processors. For us a 'Time-Share' was togetherness, a 'chip' was a piece of wood or fried potato, hardware meant nuts and bolts and 'software' wasn't a word. When we were young 'Made in Japan' meant junk, the term 'making out' referred to how you did in your exams, 'stud' was something that fastened a collar to a shirt and 'going all the way' meant staying on a double decker bus to the terminus. In our day, cigarette smoking was 'fashionable', 'grass' was mown, 'coke' was kept in a coalhouse, a 'joint' was a piece of meat you ate on Sundays and 'pot' was something you cooked in. 'Rock Music' was a mother's lullaby while 'aids' just meant help for someone in trouble. We who were born in the 40s or before must be a hardy bunch when you think of the way in which the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder there is a generation gap today but **BY THE GRACE OF GOD ... WE HAVE SURVIVED.**

The BIG Lunch Llangunnor

**Members of
Babell Chapel
Are invited to join us on
7th June**

Llangunnor School, Penymorfa Lane

FREE ENTRY

11am - 3pm

Free activities on the day include:

Art Workshops

Face Painting

Bouncy Castle

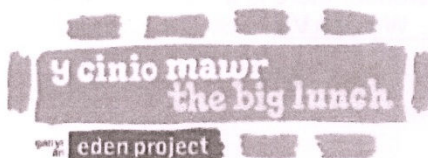
African Drumming

Football Skills

Craft Workshops

Carmarthen Twirlers

**We shall be accepting donations of dried goods
for Carmarthen Foodbank**



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f The Big Lunch Llangunnor

THE COMING QUARTER

People often complain that they have mislaid the newsletter or given it away and that, in consequence, they do not know the Sunday arrangements. The arrangements will not appear in the newsletter proper but will take the form of an insert which can be attached to the newsletter or pinned up in the house, in a visible place.

June 7th/	Minister/ Communion	2pm
June 14th	Minister	10:30 am ALL AGE SERVICE
June 21st	Minister	2pm
June 28th	Pastor John Morgan	2pm

July 5th/	Revd Viv Rees/ Communion	2:30 pm
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PLEASE NOTE THE TIME. VIV HAS THREE SERVICES THAT DAY AND THEY NEED TO BE SPACED OUT.

July 12th/	Pastor John Morgan	2pm
July 19th/	Minister	2pm
July 26th/	Minister	2pm

AUGUST/ NO SERVICES AT BABELL THIS MONTH

Sept 6th	WELCOME BACK/ Minister/ Communion	2pm
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Could I make a plea, as minister, that we make every effort to be present at worship. Numbers are not everything but are important. A good congregation gives everyone a lift, including the minister, and makes all the effort worthwhile.

On July 5th Revd Viv Rees is here. He has never been to Babell before. It would be lovely if as many as possible were here to welcome him.

With thanks

MFS