

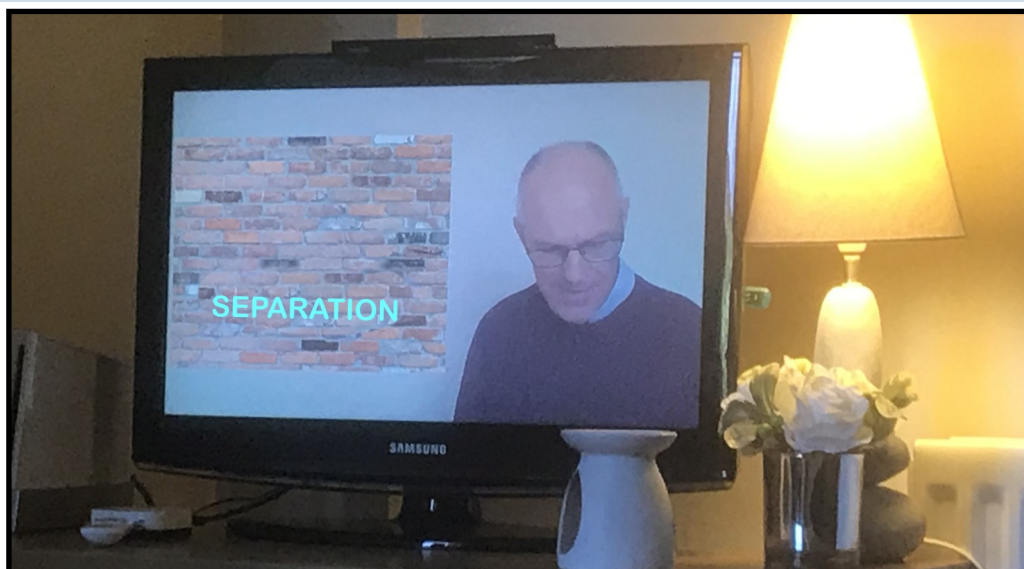
FINDING WAYS TO GATHER WHEN SCATTERED

How Hope Gobaith responded to COVID -19

'Scattered' and 'Gathered'. Two simple words that describe the heartbeat of our Baptist identity. Yet who would have thought that when we scattered from our meeting places on 15th March this year that we were about to enter the new world of social distancing, shielding and lockdown? The challenge; how can we gather when we are scattered? This is one story... the story of Hope/Gobaith Baptist Church in Llanelli.

By the following Sunday, a Hope/Gobaith YouTube Channel had been created, and, at 11am that morning, a 'Livecast' service. It wasn't slick, there wasn't music and it was all pretty scary 'going live' to the world... or the few that watched. Using a combination of phone calls, our website and Facebook we'd done our best to let as many of our Church family know it was happening. One by one people began to respond. They'd watched it. 'Be still: know who is God' was the theme. People's hearts had been stilled by God's presence... in their homes... homes as far afield as Ontario in Canada!

But what of the significant number in the Hope/Gobaith family who do not have any internet connection? Was this time to be one that would divide us according to our technological skill or privilege? 'Whypay?' and 'Twilio' came to the rescue. Using a landline at local call charges these two services enabled us to become inclusive of those who would perhaps feel the most isolated during these days. 'Whypay?' is a phone conferencing service that allows multiple people to be involved in a phone call at the same time. People could now listen to the service on Sunday whilst it was being broadcast on



Online Worship

YouTube. Also, it's a tool that has enabled us to continue to pray together... and for the Deacons to meet! For those who prefer we now have a 'Phone Sermon' available courtesy of 'Twilio'. This means that people can phone a local landline number and listen to that week's sermon... and they can do it any time day or night!

And then there is 'Zoom'! 'It's not as complicated as it looks!', we were told. And it isn't. Imagine the joy of seeing the face of a 91 year-old 'self-isolating' member of the Hope/Gobaith family appear on the screen for the first time at one of our 'Zoom Prayer Meetings' last week. And for those who cannot — or prefer not — they can join a Zoom meeting using their landline. It's not perfect... but it is a fantastic servant that enables us to see each other and share. A 'Men's Brunch', a 'Ladies Coffee Morning', and, for us, sharing Communion, have all been made possible through Zoom. Next week we will be worshipping and praying together with our friends in Grace Church, New York with the help of Zoom.

Hope/Gobaith is not a church 'full' of experts. Much of the set-up of these things has been down to one person

whose gifting allow him to navigate (and enjoy!) the technological terrain. He has made himself available to help other local Baptist Churches begin to set up both 'Whypay?' and 'Twilio'. The production of the YouTube services falls on a few very committed 'learners' who realise that mistakes are good teachers and necessity still births invention. Although the time investment in each of these is considerable... the financial costs are negligible.

In days gone by, we would often begin our worship by affirming 'The Lord is here; His Spirit is with us'. Wherever we are, we are learning still to affirm that 'The Lord is here'. And, whether the means of meeting be Zoom, Whypay? or whatever, our experience is 'His Spirit is with US'. Could it be that God is teaching us that it is possible to be 'scattered' yet still 'gathered'.

Reverend Paul Smethurst

**'Not by might nor by power,
but by my Spirit,'
says the LORD Almighty.'
(Zechariah 4:6)**

THE DIGITAL PRAYER MEETING

SOAR LLWYNHENDY

Whilst not every Church has been able to develop digital worship media during the COVID-19 period, some however have succeeded in holding weekly prayer meetings via the phone.

One of these Churches is Soar, Llwynhendy where the Reverend Ian Lewis is the Minister. With the help of one of the members at Hope Church, Llanelli, Ian has been able to use the telephone conference system 'WHYPAY?' to hold weekly prayer meetings which means that up to 50 members can join together to pray and support each other.

How does it work? It's very easy! Once an account has been set up everybody rings one number to 'reach' the Conference Room between 6.45pm and 7.00pm. When everybody has arrived, the prayer meeting begins!

What is the cost? If you have a bundle of minutes as part of your telephone package, then it doesn't



cost a penny. If you do not have a package then a call would cost the same as for the call to a 01 or 02 number.

'It has been so good to share in prayer with folk from Soar, Llwynhendy, Bethlehem, Pwll and friends from Greenfield, Llanelli and a real blessing recently to hear one of members who is originally from Kenya recite the Lord's prayer in her

mother tongue', said Ian.

In addition Ian also prepares a weekly message which is despatched to members and friends either through the post, e-mail or from door to door.

If you would like to learn more about the 'WHYPAY?' conference call facility then please contact the Reverend Ian Lewis or Reverend Paul Smethurst.

BLESSINGS DURING INTERNSHIP

I'm six months into my internship at Moriah. It's been amazing being involved in different ministries: Coffee Break, Toddlers, Messy Church, Young Adults, 19down, to name a few! These are wonderful opportunities to meet people from the Church and local community and show Jesus' love to them.

Highlights have been: A team preach with Rachel (also interning at Moriah); exploring theology through reading and discussing Alister McGrath's book, 'Theology - the basics'; leading an all-age Christmas service with lots of audience participation bringing all of the generations of the Church together! It was an amazing time to learn that sometimes you need to change the way we do 'church' to be able to connect with a generation of younger people, many of whom are just starting to find out about Jesus.



In December it was great to be a part of 'Christmas Through the Keyhole',

an outreach to the local schools. Children go on a trail around different Nativity characters' 'rooms'

looking for clues about where all of the people have gone - ending up in a stable! It was an exciting way to present the Gospel message.

In January, I was given the opportunity to launch 'Sparks', a new children's club. A place where children have space to hear Bible stories, make crafts and play games together ('Messy Church' style). It's also been great to be a part of a new monthly youth event, 'The Gathering', where young people from across the Gwent Baptist Association meet together to discover more about Jesus, have food and play games.

Throughout this time, I've been blessed to witness (and be part of) all that God is doing in Risca.

Rebekah Smethurst

(This report was prepared before the restriction measures came into force).

WHEN THE COLLECTION STOPS, KEEP GIVING!

The Coronavirus crisis is forcing many of us to assess our practices: how we gather for worship, how we read and respond to God's Word, how we pray together and support one another. One aspect we don't like talking about is money. We're all familiar with the 'collection' after the notices, and a prayer asking God to bless that which is faithfully given. But what happens when the collection plate stops?

In these unusual circumstances, it might be helpful to remind ourselves why we do what we do. What is the purpose of the offering? Is it to keep our membership alive through contributions? Is it to pay for the worship service we just shared in? Neither of those are at the heart of why we bring our gifts to God.

Perhaps the real clue lies in the word 'offering'. As Christians the Bible teaches us to 'offer' back to God a portion of what He has given to us. From the days of Cain & Abel this was always meant to be an integral part of our worship, a sacrifice. In Old Testament times, the practice of 'tithing' was encouraged. Giving a tenth of your produce or income to God was one way in which the people recognised God's blessing on their lives and the priests were thus able to



minister to the people of Israel. This reminds us that we are only stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.

Jesus spoke a lot about giving too. Not so much about the amount we give, but the attitude of our hearts when we give. In the New Testament the early church practised generosity and warned against holding back from God. They cared for each other, for the poor and for the Apostles who ministered among them.

So if the Chapel is closed for now,

the Church is still open and perhaps now, more than ever, we need to keep giving. We may not be singing hymns together in worship, but we can still worship through giving. Why stop?

If you can help others, maybe now is a good time to give to the local foodbank or set up a hardship fund for anyone in the chapel in need of help.

If you need help because of lost income, please talk to someone and don't wait until the problem becomes greater. There is help available for you.

If you give regularly to your chapel, please continue. You could set up a Standing Order through the bank or simply keep your weekly envelopes safe until you are able to return to chapel. This will reassure the Treasurer who still has bills to pay.

Finally, don't forget your Minister and his/her family need help too. Even if the work of holding Sunday services has stopped for now, the Minister will still be pastoring, praying, preparing reflections and caring for the sick and dying.

Reverend Simeon Baker

Director of Mission

KEEPING SAFE WITH ZOOM



For churches using Zoom or considering other ways of connecting online, the issue of safeguarding remains an important one. Here is a summary of simple things you can do to stay safe. You can find a fuller explanation online at <http://www.buw.org.uk/keeping-safe-when-using-zoom-online/>

What are we safeguarding against? Someone with malicious intent targeting your group meeting and sharing inappropriate, offensive or even illegal content.

TEN STEPS TO KEEP YOU SAFER

1. Do not make public your Zoom meeting link or access codes:
2. Generate new Meeting links and use Meeting Passwords.
3. Use the 'Waiting Room' facility to screen entry.
4. Check you know who's in the Room.
5. Lock the Meeting after starting.
6. Disable Screen Sharing.
7. Mute 'All' to prevent interruptions.

8. Keep an eye on the chat box.
9. Remove unwanted guests if necessary.
10. Turn off File Transfer & Annotation

YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S WORK ON ZOOM

Please remember that ALL the safeguarding principles and practice we apply to working with vulnerable adults, children and young people STILL applies with online materials and gatherings online.

The above steps are especially important when safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

In addition please note:

You should have at least 2 leaders on the call and in the meeting first.

You should still report any concerns through your reporting procedures.

You should not record your meetings due to the challenges of an individual's right to privacy, parental and personal consent and safe data storage.

CORONAVIRUS AND FINANCE ISSUES

The past few weeks have undoubtedly been very challenging as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The effects have been far-reaching for all parts of our society. We know of families who have experienced difficult bereavements and individuals who have lost their livelihoods. In addition, there has been a tremendous increase in the use of food banks. Our churches will not be immune to the situation and I was keen therefore to contact you with some words of encouragement and some suggestions and information that might be of help.

What can the Union do to help?

Firstly, if any Church or Minister is facing challenging financial circumstances or a period of hardship, please would you get in touch with me.

We will do all we can to respond to any request for help and we will consider all such requests on an individual and confidential basis.

What can the Associations do to help?

If the local Association has the means to help Churches or Ministers who are

in need of financial assistance, then I would encourage each Association to do what they can and actively reach out to Churches and Ministers.

What can the Churches do?

As weekly services are not currently being held in our chapels, the weekly offering will not be made unless contributions are received through bank standing orders. This will therefore lead to a reduction in the Church's income but at the same time costs will still have to be met such as the Minister's stipend, insurance, heating bills etc. If the Church has reserves then maybe now is the time to draw on these funds. Churches might also wish to consider sending a letter to members encouraging them to continue to give by establishing a bank standing order. Please remember that not everybody will be able to contribute due to personal circumstances and you might wish to consider setting up a hardship fund for Church members.

Is there any other kind of help available?

The Welsh Government has established two funds to help

charities (including churches and faith groups) during the emergency period. These include funding passed on from the UK Government under its schemes and additional funding from Welsh Government. Here are the links for these funding schemes, applications for which are now open:

Third sector resilience fund for Wales (for charities which have lost income due to the emergency) - <https://wcva.cymru/funding/social-investment-cymru/third-sector-resilience-fund-for-wales/>

Voluntary services emergency fund (for charities which are helping directly with COVID-19 and its social effects) - <https://wcva.cymru/funding/volunteering-wales-grants-scheme/>

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Churches and Ministers for all that is being undertaken in the name of Jesus. Thank you for the care, the services and prayers which have been invaluable.

*Judith Morris,
General Secretary*

The Pentecost Prayer Pack

2020
YEAR OF
PRAYER



'Lord, teach us to pray'

The third pack in the Prayer 2020 series is now available.

In this prayer pack you will find encouragement to pray in your own quiet place and God willing – the opportunity to meet once again together in prayer. Imagine, gathering again for the first time and sharing together in prayer.

As the Church is made of 'living stones' let's ask the Lord of the Church to send His Holy Spirit afresh to us; To renew us in Spirit, comfort

those who mourn and breathe new life into His Church.

A taste of what's in the pack:

When God the Holy Spirit comes as promised

Bible Reflection: John 14: 15-31

What do these words mean for you?

In John 14, Jesus speaks to a confused and frightened group of disciples as they contemplated his predictions concerning his betrayal and death. How could they imagine life without Jesus? How would they find him again?

In the midst of their uncertainty, He speaks of hope. He promises that He will not leave them as orphans but will send another comforter / advocate - the Holy Spirit.

As Christians, we believe that this

promise was fulfilled at Pentecost and is still true for us today.

This Pentecost, we pray that we would know the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives.

*Come down, O Love divine!
seek out this soul of mine
and visit it with your own ardour
glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, your holy flame
bestowing.*

*Jubilate Hymns version of Discendi,
amor santo Bianco da Siena (fl.1367
- 1434) adapted by Richard F
Littledale (1833 - 1890) © Jubilate
Hymns Ltd*

A complete copy of the Pentecost Prayer Pack can be found on the Welsh Baptist Union website at www.buw.org.uk and click on the pack in 'Latest News'.