



The

Messenger

No 25

Autumn 2022

www.buw.wales

Heating the chapel or the
church?

New start in Dolgellau
and more...



Welcome...

Editorial	2
Mission Notes - energy crisis	3
Ministry in Dolgellau	4
A space for the community	5
News from Wales	6
World news	7
Getting to know: Janet Matthews	8

At the beginning of a new season, it's been good to see Union activities restarting and recently the Women's Mission Zenana Conference was held in Lampeter, the Annual Meetings of the Women's Movement held in Cardiff along with the first meeting of the 'Engage' Mission programme held on Zoom.

In addition, this is the time of the year when new ministers are ordained and inducted and it has been a great blessing to welcome Neil Warburton, Fishguard; Richard Miles, Upper Trosnant; Tomos Roberts-Young, Tonna and Misha Pedersen, Newbridge on Wye. The Reverends Dr Rosa Hunt and Andrew Barker have been inducted at Tabernacl, Cardiff and Mount Pleasant, Blackwood respectively and Danni Worley has been welcomed to Dolgellau.

At the same time we wish our students well at the beginning of a new academic year, namely Rebecca Smethurst, Katie Collins, Gruffudd Jenkins, Dale Norman and Hannah Smethurst.

We give thanks for six Christian workers from abroad who have responded to God's call to move to Wales so as to work with our churches: Nana and Sungsu Paek, Anna Ketchum, Linda and Jeff Kim and Phil Wyman.

Not only does God continue to call people but they continue to respond. Although the Christian context has changed enormously over the years along with the constant need to reconsider our methods of mission and the ways in which we share the Christian faith with others, one thing hasn't changed since the days of Jesus. Whatever the social context and religious trends of our days, the Church's main need in every season is for people who love Jesus and who are prepared to follow Him.

We ask God's blessing on our new beginnings giving heartfelt thanks for those who love the Lord and who give of their time and talents generously in His name!

Judith Morris, General Secretary



Energy crisis - heating the chapel or the church?

One of the most difficult decisions any small group of members has to make is when the time has come to close the chapel. During these past two years Covid has hit many of our churches hard and disrupted patterns of worship. Some have learnt to meet on Zoom, temporarily close the chapel, meet outside, sit 2 metres apart (although Baptists have been doing this for years!), not sing, sing with masks, not take a collection etc. That's a lot of change for people who don't like change! Then there are the finances. All the above has brought added financial pressures and it seems this is likely to get even harder this winter. The energy costs of heating large empty chapel buildings with old and inefficient heating systems is going to significantly rise and perhaps those same questions will return; how do we continue to meet?

Some might decide to say that instead of masks at the door we will be giving out blankets! But there are some practical measures that may help:

- Meeting in the vestry or another, smaller space on your site
- Meeting in a member's house, a café or another community space
- Taking a meter reading before October 1st
- Ask your energy company for an estimate of your bill over the winter months
- Consider meeting each week with another local church in order to reduce each church's bills

Whilst it would be easy to feel defeated, this energy crisis is perhaps another opportunity to re-imagine and remember the way Baptists as non-conformists have the freedom to do church. New Testament churches met in homes and households. They gathered around tables for fellowship and food, breaking bread and sharing life. They found ways to worship around Scripture, prayers, songs – as the Spirit led. Many voices, not just one.

As Baptists we share these beliefs:

- A church that is the people of God, not the building.
- The gathered church – even with 'two or three' Jesus has promised his presence.
- A worshipping church – that can be more varied than a hymn / prayer sandwich.
- A church that ministers to each other where are all called to serve.

It's worth noting that the largest church in the world today is in China. In a country where religious freedom is restricted to a greater extent than anything we've experienced, this church has not only survived but grown (recent estimates are around 100 million believers – 22 million more in the last decade). Most of these churches meet in homes and small gatherings – and don't therefore have to deal with the heating costs of large, old buildings but can focus on the main thing instead – which includes, of course, serving those outside the church struggling with the same real issues.

During the 'Explore' course this past year I was struck by a sentence in the book we were following by David Fitch called 'Faithful Presence' – 'As Christendom wanes and the old ways of attraction fail to bring in new church members, and our resources for doing good in the world dissipate, we have no choice but to lead our communities into being present to Christ in all the circles of our lives. We have no choice but to practice his kingdom as an entire way of life.' (p.183). If these last two years have taught us anything, it has encouraged us to think about why meeting as the church still matters and how we can be the church today. If the way we have been doing church has not helped new members discover Jesus – maybe it's time to think again about the way we do church? It is always sad when a chapel has to consider closing but long may the church continue.

Simeon Baker, Director of Mission



Missional Ministry

in Dolgellau

'This is our life's work now,' muses Danni as we sit in a café off the central square in Dolgellau. Danni – a Baptist minister –, her husband and two primary-school aged children had just moved to the town earlier in the summer, and the kids were nearing the end of their first week at Ysgol Bro Idris. But there is currently no Baptist church in Dolgellau, Judah Chapel having closed three years ago. 'But I believe God is committed to this place and its people, and that is our calling too.'

Called to this ministry

Danni and her husband's relationship with Dolgellau as a place has been strangely interwoven with their walk with Jesus. Both became Christians as adults, after Danni had had a background in New Age practices. 'I had been independent, so self-sufficient – and then we had such a dramatic crisis as a family, and God intervened really miraculously. It was shortly after that that I came to know Jesus, and a Christian couple I had started getting to know offered us a holiday on them in their cottage in Dolgellau. It was just such a healing gift – the gesture, the time, and the place itself. And we kept coming back – little realising at the beginning that God would then call us to move and minister here!'

Like many in full-time ministry, Danni was initially reluctant when she started feeling the call to become a minister. But as she embarked on training and placements, she gradually realized that the call was not to serve in the area they were living in eastern England at all.

Hospitality in community

They kept coming back west to Wales and to Dolgellau, and Danni fondly remembers how her husband – not yet a believer – would exclaim as they entered Gwynedd that 'if God created this, he both terrifies and excites me in equal measure!' When he came to faith himself, and a long process of discernment with BUW and the Association dovetailed with the family being able to buy a house in the town for unforeseen circumstances, they saw how the pieces were falling into place. Hazel Williams-Jones from Denbigh, Flint and Meirion Baptist Association said that 'the Association is delighted that the Baptist witness that had been so strong in the town will now continue with a new guise.'

Despite now having four years' experience as a church minister in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire, Danni explains that she's not looking to plant a church congregation in the town in any kind of rush. 'I am a Baptist minister, and I'm very happy to tell people that. But for the time being, that means a ministry of hospitality; giving and receiving, serving people in the town as I get to know them and listening to them. I will pray for them – and when people want to know, I will tell them about Jesus.' As a primarily Welsh-speaking community, what that also means for Danni and the whole family is the need to learn the language to fluency, and really get to know this new culture for them. 'It's such a privilege,' Danni says with a twinkle in her eye, 'and I believe the time will come when this town once again has a reputation for its spiritual life in Christ!'



A space for the church and the community...

'This has been a real journey of faith for the fellowship,' Peter explains as we survey the new church building going up in the heart of Pembroke, 'but we are praying it will be completed, somehow, within the next year.' Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is a group of eighty or so Christians of all ages drawn from in and around the town of Pembroke, that have been meeting in a local school for the best part of a decade. But now a Baptist Building Fund for Wales (BBFW) loan has enabled their building project to take a real step forward, and we visited to see the new roof in place.

We sold our old chapel building in town ultimately because we couldn't get the necessary permissions to modify it and make it more suitable for contemporary needs. We weren't sure and were praying a lot, but God showed us he was in the process so clearly when we sold the manse for £175k and this plot came up for that exact sum – and the owner then told us he wanted to sell it to our church! Since then, the building project has progressed step by step, and with the exception of two loans from the BBFW, the money has come in from the church itself. Over the last five years, the church has had no minister but has grown and kept its vision even as it has sacrificially given to see this building project to fruition.

'Whether part of this building becomes a children's play centre for the community to use midweek, or a café / food provision or some other sort of social enterprise in the town, we are not sure yet. But we want the building to be well used and to serve the people outside the church, so we're just still praying about that at the moment – what doors God will open, and continue to look to the changing needs in our community. We have two to three hundred thousand to go in order to pay for the

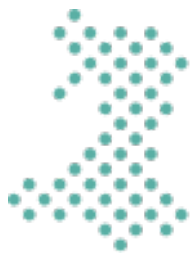
internal works and the fittings, so we shall see!'

As we walk through the building and into the sanctuary, the wave shaped roof already creates a sense of lightness that will make this a welcoming space for the church to meet. 'This is exactly the sort of thing the Welsh Baptist Union Corporation exists to support', says Hugh Tribe, one of its Directors. 'We are an arms-length body of the BUW whose purpose is to support Baptist witness across Wales, and particularly on the capital and buildings side of things.'

Over the past few years the capital loans they have given to churches have included everything from manses to badly needed maintenance such as replacing windows, ensuring disabled access, installing modern toilet facilities and more. 'We are delighted to help support the church's witness in this key market town,' Hugh says, 'and if other churches want to apply for a loan from us, they are very welcome to do so by contacting the BUW office.'

Back in Pembroke, it is heartening to think that Mount Pleasant has existed as a fellowship since 1830, and has been able to testify to God's faithfulness down the years. The demographic of the church has been steadily changing to a younger congregation and over the last couple of years they have seen young adults baptized, new families attending the church and a growing Sunday School work. 'We are both expectant and excited as we wait on The Lord for the next chapter,' says Peter.

If you as a church would like to talk to the BBFW about loans, you are welcome to do so by contacting the BUW office for a conversation at any time.



News from across....

The Baptist Union of Wales



Return to Blackwood!

'There's no way we can go back there!' So thought Andy Baker, born in Blackwood and raised as a teenager through Mt Pleasant church in the town. But after thirty years in the ministry in England, he and his wife felt a call back to South Wales and started investigating options. One by one doors were closed until a meeting with the leadership of Mt Pleasant. The further the conversation progressed, the more the obstacles fell away until the match felt like a good one for both sides.

'I'm excited about it now', says Andy who was inducted on Saturday 3rd September. 'Obviously I have a lot of catching up to do with people in the church and the town on a personal level,' and that chimes with his vision for the next stage in the life of the church; recreating community. 'Covid has meant a lot of us still need to reconnect, and that is also true of our connections with the community. We need to turn our eyes outwards, and spend less time maybe in internal church meetings', says Andy. 'I love introducing people to Jesus, and I'd love to see us as a church doing that naturally.'

Andy tells me that apart from being a pastor, people would know him as sports-mad. So it's appropriate that after we talk, he is on his way to play a round of golf with someone from the community who is on the church's fringe; to build that relationship, and maybe in time introduce the guy to Jesus.

Baptisms, blessing and BBQ

'Back at the beginning of the summer, on a very fine day we had the first baptisms by Ebenezer's new minister, Sian Elin. The three who came forward to be baptised were Fflur, Steffan and Dylan. This was a real joy and cause for celebration as all three decided to be immersed in the water and then accepted as members in Ebenezer. As Fflur put it, 'The experience of being baptised was quite unique. I can't put it into words! It was so wonderful to be able to share that day with the faithful members of the chapel, friends and family. And it was also an emotional day for Sian Elin as she got to baptize her son and husband.

On the following Sunday there was another reason for celebration in Ebenezer as they came together to present a baby to the church. Ffion Cadi was introduced to the congregation to thank God for her life and ask for his blessing on the little one. The story of Noah's Ark and the rainbow was shared by the Minister as God's promise of a new beginning. And at the end of the month a bus came from North Teifi Baptist Pastorate to join in the service and the Summer Party that followed. Despite the rain, everyone enjoyed socializing in the vestry and Sian Elin shared a message about the feeling many of us have that we are not good enough. But by faith we know we don't need to think in this way, secure in the knowledge that God loves us always.

Sian Elin took the opportunity to thank the pastorate for every support she has received during her entire first year as Minister. There's no doubt that a lot happened, that tears were shed and a whole lot of laughter. But through God's help we look forward to the future and to working as a team to strengthen the cause of Jesus Christ in our area.



New start in Breconshire

Paul and Robyn Smethurst will be moving from Hope Gobaith church in Llanelli to Breconshire, where Paul has taken up the post of Missional Minister for the Association and Robyn will be working alongside him. 'There are many unknowns,' Paul said, 'but it is exciting to recognize what God is doing in the country, despite the smallness of churches' situations. We're open to his leading!' Rev Anne Roberts, Association Secretary, noted how encouraged they are 'that God has called someone new to us – Breconshire is still on God's agenda!' The Smethursts are currently between places as they look for a house in the right place in the area. Do pray for them and that current need.

Afghanistan a year on

The past year has held many tragedies for Afghanistan. The cost of living crisis, a dramatic change in government and natural disasters in an already fragile nation have led to much change in the lives of ordinary people. BMS worker Ruby* told us about some of the differences she's seen to life in the country over the last year.

"It's much quieter. Fewer people on the street milling around," she says. But despite this, Ruby knows there are still so many communities which need help. The change in government means that women in Afghanistan now have to be much more careful with the clothes they wear. "We have to wear more layers now than we ever used to," Ruby says. "We used to be able to just wear long dresses with trousers on but now we're having to wear full length jackets or wraps down to our feet." Women now have to carry paperwork with them to prove they're allowed to work, and some authorities won't let women go to work at all. All of this further reinforces for Ruby and her team just how crucial it is to keep working with and empowering women where they can, despite the challenging context.

"Prices are more expensive - some things have doubled in price," says Ruby. "There are many more beggars on the street now than there ever were, so obviously poverty is on the rise." Countries like Afghanistan, where people were already struggling, will be feeling the strain from the rising cost of living the most.

Despite the challenges Afghanistan is facing right now, BMS have not given up hope of reaching people there. BMS supporters have been lifting Afghanistan up in prayer so faithfully over the last year, and your prayers really have opened doors for BMS work to begin again. Please do keep praying for this nation. "Please pray for peace, mainly within people," says Ruby. "I think there's so much stress and so much uncertainty, people need to have peace within themselves, that they're doing what they can. And pray for the new government, to be able to actually help its people."

Words by Laura Durrant, with thanks to BMS



Welcoming refugees in Moldova

Moldova is a small country in southeast Europe, bordering Ukraine on three sides and home to 2.6 million people. But by 23 August this year, the UN reported 585,614 border crossings from Ukraine because of the war. In August 2022, Helle Liht, EBF Assistant General Secretary and Rachel Conway-Doel from BMS World Mission, visited the work of Moldovan Baptists among refugees.

Visionary Moldovan Baptist leaders decided to open their as yet uncompleted conference centre to those escaping the war. At once it was transformed into a home for 500 refugees. Miracles started to happen. The heating and electricity were connected faster than expected. People from surrounding villages left food behind the doors and left without a word. One neighbour asked whether they needed pork and when he came, it was an entire pig. Others brought eggs, flour, vegetables, bread and pastries. A chef who had decided to leave the country because of the war decided to stay and volunteer for the centre. Most people at the centre had never eaten such tasty food as cooked by this chef!

Christian psychologists visit the camp each week and offer support to mothers and children. Beautiful paintings and handicrafts created by children and mothers during therapy sessions decorate the rooms. The refugees have created a rota to help serve food, wash up and keep things tidy. They have helped continue to build the centre. One landscape architect has designed an area with the refugees helping to plant lavender and other plants around it.

None of this is conditional; working hours are not counted, personal resources not spared, and refugees are embraced with love and care. And the lives of war victims have started changing. We saw children playing football, running around and laughing. Mothers looked relaxed when they talked at the dinner table, grateful smiles enlightening their faces.

When the camp leaders told these stories, it very vividly brought to our minds the Old Testament story of Elijah and the widow who used her last bit of flour and oil to bake bread for the prophet. She heard the call, trusted God and her "jar of flour was never used up and the jug of oil did not run dry."

Words by Helle Liht, with thanks to EBF

And from around...
The World



Ten minutes with... *Janet Matthews*

There are people of all sorts in our churches, all with different stories of how God has worked in their lives. This time, we're meeting an active member of Breconshire Baptist Association....

Lovely to meet you, Janet! So how did you come to faith and end up where you are?

Well, I was actually brought up in Bristol as an Anglican! And despite confirmation as a teenager, I drifted away. But then I met my husband, Terry, who was from Blaenavon and had a clear desire to go into Baptist ministry. So that changed my life! We arrived in Breconshire in the early eighties, with five rural churches forming a ministry area for Terry. I had my own full-time work as a social worker and community development officer, but I got very involved in Sunday school work and children's work in the chapels.

And you have also had wider involvement in ministry too over recent years?

I got heavily involved in my own chapel, where I am now secretary, when we started a building project a decade ago. Our chapel is in a remote spot in the mountains, but it's such a beautiful location! So we wanted to convert the old minister's stable (!) into a space that could be used by the church and the community. Then I also serve with the Breconshire Ministry Trust, that has made a lot of difference around here – and then had the honour of serving as BUW President!

How have you been encouraged in church life?

Well, being able to go to the European Baptist conference in Glasgow when I was President was so exciting for me. Because there were people there from all over and you got to really experience what it means that our small, rural chapels are a part of a global church. There were so many different expressions of church represented, and varied voices and backgrounds! Meeting some of these people from across the world made me realize properly for the first time the freedom we have to worship, and how we really do take that for granted. I think the other thing that has encouraged me so much is the support I received from church people when Terry died. That made such a difference to me and I do believe that churches have a huge role to play in people's lives.

Thank you. What signs of hope do you see as you look forward?

In our Association we are looking forward enormously to Paul and Robyn Smethurst coming (see p.6) - we really are full of hope for that! We are very small in number and spread around over a dozen rural chapels. But we do feel that God is leading us in this new chapter, which is exciting!

Thank you. And we will pray with you for the next chapter in Breconshire!

THE MESSENGER is produced three times a year by the Baptist Union of Wales. However, viewpoints expressed in this magazine should not be taken as representing the Union's official stance on any given matter. Registered office:

Y Llwyfan, College Road, Caerfyrddin, SA31 3EQ

Tel 0345 222 1514 [9-5 Mon - Fri]

post@ubc.cymru

www.ubc.cymru

