

SUMMER 2024
ISSUE 29
buw.wales



The Messenger

Creation and the Glory of God
Summer Conferences
Radical Hope in India
and more...

Editorial

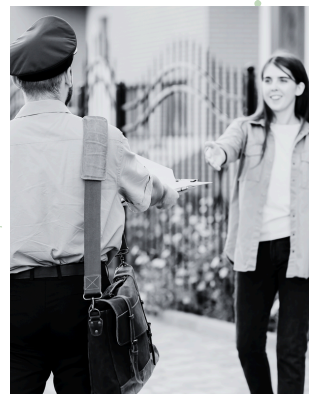
SUMMER 2024

note

CONTENTS

ISSUE 29

We are all 'messengers' of some sort, carrying certain messages and beliefs from our lives and hearts to those around us: through word, action and deed. We also receive messages all the time - from social media, from the people around us and from the environments we live in. If this is true about the world we live in, it's amazing to think about how the Eternal God sends messages to us all the time! We know that Jesus was the ultimate 'Messenger' who came to reveal the Father to us, but we also know that He speaks to us today in many ways through His Word and by His Spirit...



One of the ways we know God speaks to us is through His creation (Psalm 19:1)! At this time of year in Wales, the flora and fauna around us fills our surroundings with colour and richness. Some of my favourite summer memories have been those where the majority of my time was spent outside. One particular holiday stays in my memory, as a group of us went on a hiking retreat in the Lake District, and I spent the majority of the time walking and praying about a major life decision. I found that I was able to connect with God's heart and hear His voice in a deep way in the solitude of the mountains, in a way that was difficult surrounded by the busyness and distractions of life. His word also came alive to me in that time as I had the space to read and engage deeply with the Bible.

In this edition of The Messenger, Paul Smethurst explores this idea of how God uses **His creation to speak**, and reveal aspects of His glory (p.3). There is also a sense in which God invites us to point others to Him as they share in the same experiences - opening up a missional side of engaging with His creation. I believe God's speaking through creation is intricately connected with how He speaks to us through His word - they both refer to the other! Without an experience of creation, it would be difficult to understand much of the imagery in the Bible. But, if we relied on creation alone to tell us about God, we would never learn about the character and nature of this God who has revealed Himself in history, and ultimately through His Son Jesus.

The theme woven throughout our summer conferences this year was the richness of Scripture and **how God speaks to us today through His word** (p.4). It was amazing to be reminded by Andrew Ollerton how 'dynamic' the Bible is, and how it is transforming the lives of many who have had an encounter with God through its pages. The Rev. Misha Pedersen writes about one of her first experiences of God speaking to her through a Bible study as a teenager (p.8), setting the scene for the rest of her life's calling to be a 'messenger'! In 'BUW News' (p.6) and 'News Across the World' (p.7), we also read about others who have been **called to be 'messengers'** in various ways in Wales, India and Turkey. However you most easily hear God's voice in your life - whether through Scripture, beholding His glory in creation or through the many other ways He speaks, I pray that God will use this edition of the Messenger to bless and speak to your heart...

In Christ,

Sioned Graves (Missions and Communications Officer)

- 1 Cover
- 2 Editorial note
- 3 Mission: Creation & The Glory of God
- 4 Our Summer Conferences
- 5 Hope in the Midst of Crisis
- 6 BUW News
- 7 News across...
- 8 Getting to know...

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.

MISSION: CREATION

& the glory of God

Paul Smethurst shares some of his recent missional experiences, and how he sees God using His creation to speak to those who know Him, and those who don't yet know Him!

The Psalmist David penned the words, 'The heavens declare the glory of God...' (Psalm 19:1). Living in Bannau Brycheiniog, with its International Dark Sky Reserve status, we have been privileged a front row seat to witness this reality! And serving in this community, we are learning how deeply missional the Psalmist's statement is.

We are often encouraged to 'find out what God is doing, and then join with Him in it.'

Since our arrival here in February last year, one of the things that we have seen God doing is revealing something of His glory to people through the environment. For some, it seems that as yet they only hear a faint whisper, for others, His voice seems presently to be drowned out by other voices; but still, for others, in Francis Schaeffer's memorable words, it is clear that 'He is there and He is not silent'. So, seeing what God is doing, the question for us became, 'How do we join in with Him?'

Nestled into the hill-side below Hay Bluff, two miles and seven hundred feet above the nearest village, lies Penyrheol Chapel.

Despite its remoteness, it is here where we have found the greatest opportunities to join in with God in this part of His mission. Supported by SU Cymru as part of their Faith Guide initiative, we have begun a monthly midweek gathering for all ages called 'Go Wild!'. The ethos of the club is simple. Using the beautiful environment in the grounds of Penyrheol Chapel, we spend time together enjoying and exploring creation whilst discovering the Creator. Some months you will find us building a Bug Hotel, others discovering

the usefulness of discarded twigs, and in the darker winter months, learning how to find the North Star. It's hands on. And then, as we gather to make Hot Chocolate, we talk about what we have seen and done.

With creation as the visual aid, and the stories of the Bible as our companion, we encourage each other with hearts open, to listen to what God is saying to us. It is a delight over the months to see our community slowly grow both in number and in inquisitiveness and insight into the Good News.

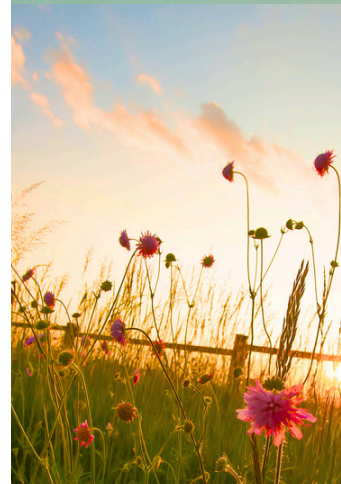
God has also used the graveyard at Penyrheol! These old and relatively undisturbed areas are some of the most biodiverse habitats in our land. Recognising

this, A Rocha UK, a Christian Conservation organisation, have established 'Churches Count on Nature'. Running for one week in June each year, it provides the opportunity to invite the community to take an audit of the flora and fauna of graveyards and church land. Beginning with a short service, we set upon the task of exploring and recording what we found at Penyrheol. It was a small, first step into another opportunity to care for creation and spotlight His glory.

So, what's God doing? Eugene Peterson translates the words of the Psalmist, 'God's glory is on tour in the skies...'. We are delighted to join with Him and be His 'Roadies'!

"For some, it seems that... they only hear a faint whisper."

"God has also used the graveyard...!"



SUMMER CONFERENCES

Sioned Graves shares her reflections and experiences from the all-age Momentum conference and the Sarn AGM, and **Bonni Davies** gives us a wonderful summary of Undeb 2024 this Summer!

Momentum - A 'Dynamic' Day for All Ages

Momentum is a day for the whole family held annually by the Baptist family in Wales, and is an opportunity for us to gather together, hear stories of God at work across Wales, and worship God together as one body!

This year, Momentum was held on the 8th of June in the Halliwell, Carmarthen. This was my first year attending, but it did not take long to feel at home in the welcoming atmosphere of the day.

The theme of this year's gathering was 'Dynamic Words // Dynamic World'. From Andrew Ollerton's opening talk, the clear theme running throughout the day was how the words of God in the Bible are 'living' and 'active', and how this is still true today. Andrew reminded us as Christians that we are called to be **open to the Spirit, open to the Scripture and open to the stranger**, as Philip was to the Ethiopian eunuch. Hearing of famous names of people (including a previous mentee of Richard Dawkins) previously closed to God now turning to the Bible and becoming committed baptized believers, was a real reminder of how powerful and precious the word of God is – how often we forget! This was reiterated by Arfon Jones' reminder to us of the critical importance of the Bible's translation into Welsh in our history as a nation, as well as how precious it is to our present era.

We were also reminded how God speaks powerfully to us by His Spirit as we 'listen' for His active words in our lives, as Danni and Nick shared about their experiences as missional ministers where 'presence' is critical, and Maggie Rich shared about the importance of listening to the testimonies of older saints. Tabea from BMS World Mission, Cardiff Baptist College and Stephen Roberts also reiterated the importance of engaging with God's word and

God's voice in our world. The hidden gems of the day, perhaps, were the children's and youth streams which were running parallel with the main sessions. From the infectious energy of the Olympics enacted by ICE Wales, to an awesome youth stream with the Esgyn team featuring stories by BMS World Mission and an epic 'capture the flag game', a 'dynamic' day unfolded for all ages!

Sarn, Newtown AGM

The AGM at Sarn this year was launched with a lovely welcome and warm hospitality by members of Sarn and Kerry Baptist Churches over lunch. In the afternoon meetings, we heard about headlines of the BUW's work including the Welsh Baptist Union Corporation, Esgyn, and the Christian Aid Talents of Hope appeal. The Rev. Maggie Rich was later inducted as the new President of the BUW English-speaking wing at Sarn Baptist. Rev. Peter Thomas spoke powerfully from the life of Haggai, and challenged us not to base expectations of the future on what has been, but to look with zeal and hope to a future which is in the Risen Lord's hands, and to which we move with the Holy Spirit!

'[We shouldn't] base expectations of the future on what has been, but to look with zeal and hope to a future which is in the Risen Lord's hands.'

Undeb 2024: Pembrokeshire

"Adeiladaf fy Eglwys" (I will build my church) was the theme of the annual Welsh-language BUW conference which was held in Croesgoch,



Pembrokeshire on the 24th-25th of June this year. In his Presidential address, the Rev. Geraint Morse spoke of the assurance that the Church is safe as the Holy Spirit surrounds us like a ring of fire, that Jesus loves His people, and that His inheritance will surely continue. We were reminded in morning devotions with Rhys Llwyd of the Rock that the church has been built upon; and John Treharne spoke of the Rock that was rejected by the builders that became the chief cornerstone. It was lovely to welcome new ministers too in the Ministerial Service!

Further evidence of God building His church was hearing about things that have been happening within the Union, including the success of the 'Esgyn' weekend for young people. News to delight in was hearing that two of those who had been in the Team for Wales 2018 were about

to be ordained into ministry. A further example of building on a firm foundation was the proposed plan to create Regional CIO's so as to safeguard Associations and respond positively to the challenges of the 2041 Report.

Reaching people in their communities is critical to build His church, and we saw a **missional step in the Undeb** meetings as those in the community were invited to join in with fringe activities, including a BBQ night in a local farmhouse brewery that drew many that would not otherwise attend church! During the evening, we heard amazing testimonies about Jesus' work in the lives of three individuals. Another way of reaching out was the BUW's 'Talents of Hope' appeal which was generously supported in the Undeb's organized walk around St David's. It was certainly an Undeb to remember!

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS



The BUW staff team recently caught up with Christian Aid Zimbabwe, who are facing hardship and a national state of emergency, but are also seeing signs of hope in the midst of crisis.

In April, the president of Zimbabwe announced a 'state of emergency' in the country as a result of an ongoing El Nino induced drought that has affected large parts of the country.

It feels timely that as the BUW we had already been engaging in important work in the country through our **2023-24 Talents of Hope** appeal with Christian Aid, which has been working on improving the resilience of small-holder farmers. The work of Christian Aid Zimbabwe through the BRAC programme is critical in these communities. We had the privilege recently of hearing from the team in Zimbabwe, who shared with the BUW team how difficult the situation is in terms of the effect of water shortages on people and animals on the ground, in conjunction with existing economic and political challenges in the country.

Christian Aid are responding directly to the drought by training communities in water conservation, increasing access to clean water, and continuing to develop 'climate-smart agriculture' interventions which increase the resilience of farmers. They have also

observed that periods of drought lead to an increase in gender-based violence, and are working to increase community awareness and response.

According to Grace Mugebe of Christian Aid Zimbabwe, the work of the BRAC programme has seen success, **even during this drought**. 'We were in Mudzi recently, and it was very encouraging to see communities resilient and adapting to this El Nino induced drought. The communities had implemented the climate-smart agriculture techniques they had learned through the BRAC programme, and they are already preparing to bounce back from this drought!'. We will continue to stand with Christian Aid and communities in Zimbabwe as we look to the final months of the Talents of Hope appeal - please join us as we support them through a critical time!

The Talents of Hope appeal runs until December 2024. To support the appeal, you can join us individually, as a church or group as we aim to reach 750+ miles in the WALK! Wales & Zimbabwe challenge by October! You can also give towards the appeal on our website.

NEWS FROM across



New BMS & Mission Workers in Wales

This summer sees at least two new workers added to the field of mission or mission support across the BUW and BMS World Mission family in Wales.



The BMS World Mission team is expanding in Wales as John Settatree starts as Church Engagement Manager in July. His work will reach across the UK, but Wales will be a part of his remit and he is excited to build connections and relationships with churches in Wales. He will be joining others in BMS who are already based in Wales. We also welcome Phil Vickery as a Missional Minister in St David's as he joins the team at Y Groesfan with BUW. We pray God's blessing upon them both as they start new roles in the field of mission and mission support!

The Esgyn adventure continues! *(cont. overleaf)*



News from Cardiff Baptist College *(cont. overleaf)*

Rev'd Drs Rosa Hunt and Ed Kaneen share about their confidence in God's work as they come to the end of the College year at Cardiff Baptist College.

When we met as a staff team back in July 2023, we prayed for a word or a verse for our College for this year, and the one that emerged was 'confidence'. And especially, Philippians 1:6: 'I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will complete it by the Day of Christ Jesus.'

We both end the year feeling very confident in God's grace. We have just signed a new and historic partnership with BUW, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, and the Union of Welsh Independents. As a result of this partnership and our ongoing relationship with BUGB, we look forward to welcoming



around 13 new students in September - two of whom, Paula Hughes and Lynne Lewis, are from the BUW family. We will miss our leaving students very much. The BUW students who will be leaving us are Dale Norman, Gruff Jenkins, Hannah Smethurst - and Wynford Jones and Dorothy Evans who joined us for Baptist History and Principles.

We look forward to continuing to journey with our ongoing students. Please pray for them, especially the BUW students: Natalie Morgan, Sammy Llewellyn, Morwenna Thomas and Michael Thomas-Bizjak.

We are expanding our ministerial formation programme from September 2024 with students being offered a choice between week-day studying through Cardiff University or a more part-time *(continued overleaf)*

(cont from 'The Esgyn adventure...') After welcoming 32 young people to the Summit Centre, Treharris in February, the Esgyn team are excited to announce that a second Esgyn weekend will be held on the **22nd - 24th of Nov. this year!** Booking will open on the BUW website during the summer. The aim is to re-set the timing of Esgyn weekends to the Autumn, with a gathering also planned for the Momentum conference in June. 11-16 years old are warmly invited to join us for new adventures over this next year as we 'gather together to grow in faith, rising in hope for a new generation'!

General Elections and Radical Hope in India

From April - June, one of the biggest general elections in the world took place, one where 969 million people would have had the right to vote.

The occasion was the general election of India. Many Christians asked for prayer for the country, as the ultra-conservative Hindu party BJP that had pushed persecution of Christians and other minorities looked set for a huge victory that many feared would put the lives of millions of Christians and others at risk.

At the end of the general election period, the BJP coalition saw a smaller victory than expected, and many Christians are hopeful that this shaking of confidence will ensure that the government **is held to account** for its treatment of religious minorities. Despite the reality of persecution in the country, according to BMS World Mission, the church is growing in faith and boldness. According to Ben Francis from the BMS, the Lord is using persecution in India to strengthen His people, and it is causing many to 'sit up and take notice of Christianity'.

Ben has seen **4,000 'disciple-making groups'** being formed in the past year or so, and many of these are forming church groups in homes or in marketplaces or coffee shops. They see many being drawn to them, asking how they can find out more about Jesus, despite the risk of persecution. Let's pray for our brothers and sisters in India as they look to their country's future.



(cont. from 'News from Cardiff Baptist College') weekend Pathways Plus programme through the College. We are also trialling a hub in North Wales.

Thank you for your constant support, not least through praying. Please could we ask you to encourage each of your churches to pray for, identify and nurture those whom God is calling into ministry. We need them! Not just here at College, but much more importantly, to serve the kingdom in Wales and beyond.

NEWS *the world* from across

A Baptist Witness in Turkey

Turkiye is often called the cradle of Christianity. This is due to the missionary journeys of Paul that took place in modern-day Turkey, and the fact that the seven churches of Revelation



were located in the region. However, Turkey is also known to be one of the most unreached nations of the world in terms of Christian witness in the country. 99% of the population of Turkey claim to be Muslims, and Christians make up only 1% of the population.

According to the European Baptist Federation (EBF), there are several Baptist congregations in Türkiye, and they are **looking in faith to what God wants to do** in the nation as they start planting churches in their surrounding communities. Many groups of Turkish believers are starting to build bridges with local Turks through social ministry, literature, meeting one-to-one with those who are taking an interest in Jesus, and special events around Christian holidays.

One Pastor recently reported to EBF how these festive events are building trust with the surrounding community, and have made an impression on local press! Many now know that there are Christians in their region, where previously they may have thought that Christians were non-existent.

Getting to know...

Elsa & Misha

In this edition of the Messenger, we get to know **Elsa Harflett** and **Rev. Misha Pedersen**, who are dear friends and work together at Pentref Baptist Chapel. They have also recently together become joint Presidents of Senana, an organisation of Baptist women which supports the work of BMS World Mission.



Thank you for taking the time to talk to us! To start with, how did you both end up in Wales?

Elsa: Originally, I was born in Malaysia where my father was a teacher, but I grew up in Somerset and then moved to Wiltshire. I had never wanted to live in Wales, but family circumstances led to moving to Newbridge on Wye in 2013. With hindsight, I can see that the hand of God was working and it has felt like home ever since!

Misha: I'm from Denmark originally! But, I've been over here for just over 8 years. Before then, I had been working with a Geopark in Denmark. There was one over here which I visited in the Brecon Beacons as part of my studies, and eventually through various circumstances I decided to stay!

How would you both describe your journeys to faith in the Lord?

Misha: My family were not a church-going family growing up. But, when I was 14 or 15 I had a very clear experience of God speaking to me through a Bible study. That night I was sat up writing some poetry, and suddenly what I was writing changed into a poem about God's love!

However, I struggled with church. The context I was in felt quite spiritually heavy and I didn't have an understanding of the freedom Christ brings. I had also felt a call to ministry, but that was uncommon in the church I grew up in as a female, and I didn't know what to do with it! But, I came back to an active faith through an Alpha Course, where I discovered the presence and reality of the Holy Spirit, freedom in Christ, and God's grace! I also felt the call to ministry come back strongly in Wales.

Elsa: It's hard to pinpoint a time for me. I was brought up in a Christian family, and so my journey to faith sort of happened gradually over the years

But maybe I can look back at a time where it was 'going through the rituals', and further on I realized that it had become my own. There were times of 'drifting', but like when you push against an elastic band, God always brought me back!

What does ministry look like for you both at Pentref Baptist Chapel where you both serve?

Misha: We have a small congregation... but we have a reputation of being a welcoming and warm place. We didn't have any children for a while, but a few years ago we prayed into this, and through answers to prayer and steps of faith we now have a small Sunday school. Parents do also come to the services, and we love that they get to hear the gospel! We often find ourselves asking 'Do we need to do things the way we've always done things or can we try something different?'. So, we're experimenting with worshipping around tables. We've also started a shared meal once a month. We also try services that are a bit different every 5th Sunday: such as 'Pizza, Praise and Puppets'!

What is your prayer for Pentref, and for Senana which you are now both leading?

Misha and Elsa: Our prayer as a church is to welcome people into the community who may not have felt welcome before and may not yet have a faith, and give them the freedom to explore. I always say 'God has got the kettle on in His kitchen, and there's a mug on the wall with each of our names on it, and all God wants us to do is to take the mug down and have a cuppa!'. With Senana, we would love to see more young women get involved as we support the work of BMS World Mission worldwide.

You can find out more about Senana on the BUW website under 'About us'. The next Senana gathering will be on the 3rd - 5th of September at Coleg Trefeca. For more information, contact elsa.harflett.eh@gmail.com