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The Messenger

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ISSUE 30

Editorial

WINTER 2024

note

Over the journey of my life and faith, I can say with conviction that God has worked through people of all ages and generations to enrich my life.

From parents, to peers, to grandparents, to nieces and nephews (and now another little one on the way!), it's amazing to think how God uses people of all ages and stages to grow and shape us into who we are today....



Peers of the same age have played an important role in my life, as I have learnt what it means to 'run the race' together with brothers and sisters who are on a similar track. Over the past year and a bit since I joined the BUW family, one of the greatest privileges has been seeing God's hand at work in the growing provision and heart for young people through 'Esgyn'. Esgyn has created an atmosphere where young people from our churches can grow alongside others of the same age, encouraging one another and cheering each other on as they explore the adventure of following Jesus together. By the time you receive this edition, Esgyn's second residential weekend at the Treharris Summit centre will have just finished or will be just about to happen – praise God for all that He has already done through this new venture!

I have also received so much revelation and wealth in my life from the friendship and testimony of older saints: be they parents, 'aunts' or 'uncles' in the faith, or elders who are ready to pass on treasures of wisdom they have gathered over the years. I was blessed by a grandfather who showed me the true meaning of 'gentleness', a deep love for Jesus, and real gratitude, even through pain and trial. As the Psalmist says: "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts." (Psalm 145:4). It is wonderful in this edition of the Messenger to hear about the role of all generations in our midst: from the young ministers recently ordained among us (p.6), to the baptisms of many young people recently (p.7), to the crucial role of older people in our churches (p.3), and finally to the role of generations past as part of God's inheritance and revelation of His will for Jeff and Colleen's journey to Wales (p.4)... the multi-generational tapestry of God's work among us is a rich one and is beautiful evidence of God at work around us!

My prayer as we read this edition of the Messenger, is that we would consider how the Lord has called each one of us to bless and have an influence on other generations (whether younger or older), while remembering how we ourselves have been blessed and been influenced by others. As I enter maternity leave, I am aware that many hands and generations will come together to help this little one come into the world! It is amazing to think how many people the Lord has used in the lives of each one of us to shape, bless us, and help make us who we are today.

In Christ,

Sioned Graves (Missions and Communications Officer)

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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 COLUMN:

Anna-chaplaincy

BUW President Maggie Rich (English-language Wing) reminds us of the critical role of all generations in the church, and calls on us to include older generations in our mission by introducing the role and opportunity of 'Anna-chaplaincy'...

Several years ago, I began to collect stories from the older people in our Association (Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire) – stories of growing up in our rural chapels, stories of church life, sad stories, happy stories, but all stories that brought back memories. The history of a chapel is much more than the story of its building(s) and its ministers; it is also the stories of the people who gathered there to worship, to work together, to help each other and to be alongside each other through the good times and the difficult times.

It is in the telling of these stories that we hear how God has been at work in the lives of people and in the life of the church. God is still at work in the lives of all generations of our churches but how often do we take time to stop and listen? Many years ago, when I was a Junior Church leader, I brought in an elderly lady as part of the leadership team. She was almost blind and had various health issues, but she was a great listener. The children “adopted” her as everybody’s granny, and she was the one who listen to their stories; who comforted and encouraged. She was the one who could tell them Bible stories without any books – she couldn’t see to read any more – and she brought those stories alive. These were stories that she knew from childhood and this was her time to pass on those stories.

She remembered the previous huge building with its pipe organ and galleries – and she also remembered the misdemeanours of some of us who were

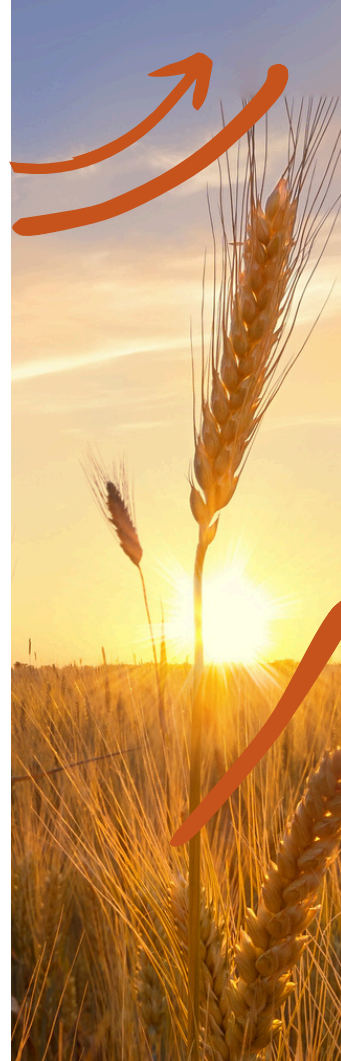
now leaders! I suspect the children enjoyed those stories the most. The older people in our churches have a lot to offer. It may not be the things that they used to do, but God is still at work, in them and through them.

In 2022 I was commissioned as an Anna Chaplain, which is chaplaincy to older people. This takes me into a local care home each week, where my role is listening to people. As trust builds, the stories come:

it’s not unusual for someone to say, “I’ve never told anyone this before.” There are stories of decisions made,

“God is still at work in all generations in our churches...”

now being questioned: did I do the right thing? There are stories of past hurts – and a need to seek peace in these situations. Sometimes there is a need for reassurance that God loves them, and a simple prayer can calm many fears. But it’s not all like this – there are the hilarious stories as well, which bring joy to both narrator and listener! One of the great joys of chaplaincy in the care home is the privilege of being alongside people who are living with dementia. The old hymns and psalms can still spark a response, and to hear someone who rarely speaks say, “and God bless you”, accompanied by a huge smile, is living proof that God is still active in that person’s life. Those who may appear to have so little can still give so much.



RETURN TO WALES...

From Pembrokeshire, to the USA and back again... Jeff and Colleen Richards' story of how God called them to Wales is an amazing tale spanning four generations....



The beginnings of Jeff and Colleen's story can be traced back around 150 years ago to rural Pembrokeshire. Jeff's great-grandfather was a farmer in Pembrokeshire, and like many others of that time, earned his living on the family farm.

In 1886, he left with his four children and pregnant wife for a new life in the USA. However, the family did not leave behind their Welsh roots, joining Welsh-speaking communities in Nebraska. What changed though in their lives was pivotal in setting the scene for God's work for generations to come. Although he had been a deacon at Hebron Baptist Church in Saundersfoot, Jeff tells how his great-grandfather's biography describes how God "chased him down" in the USA, and how he had a radical experience of being born again and surrendering his life to Jesus.

This propelled him into ministry, while still farming, and in time he became the state evangelist for Nebraska and South Dakota. At least two thousand people could have given their lives to Jesus through his ministry. Incredible family stories don't always mean that others around will follow suit, however, and Jeff shares how later generations departed from faith. Jeff's father joined the US Navy and "blew away completely" from the family.

"I was also as far away as you can get!" Jeff says. "I was not interested, and didn't want anything to do with faith." Jeff married Colleen in 1982 and she joined him in Montana. Jeff had a good job working as a mechanical engineer, and they

began to raise their family. However, Colleen describes how it "wasn't all roses". It was difficult for her as someone who had come to faith as a teenager, while her husband was not at all interested. However, a college friend of Colleen's who was also an evangelist came to stay with them and his interactions with Jeff started to soften his heart.

The real change came when this friend shared something that Jeff knew only God (and himself!) could ever know about him. "It was as though he had been given a word of knowledge that there was no way he could know on his own – it was like God was letting me know gently that He saw me and He knew me."

"It was like God was letting me know gently that He saw me and He knew..."

One evening, he was at a meeting led by his evangelist friend and he simply prayed: "God, if you're real, I will believe in you." That moment, he had a powerful encounter with the presence of God. He described the experience as being as though 'someone had hit him in the back of the head with a 2x4', and in tears, he heard God's voice calling him into a new life. That marked the beginning of a new season, and like his great-grandfather, Jeff was eventually called into ministry.

Jeff and Colleen felt God's call to minister in a church in Montana where they saw God moving powerfully and healing lives. However, during this time they were also reminded of how they had

both previously felt a call to mission. One year recently as they were feeling that God was calling them to bring their time as pastors at the local church to an end, they attended the national conference of their denomination, where three people came up to them – independently of each other - asking 'have you heard about what the Lord is doing in Wales?'

This stirred something, and led them to re-discover the story of Jeff's great-grandfather. They sought, and prayed, and increasingly felt God was calling them to come to Wales. In time, they connected with the BUW family in Wales, who also recognized God's call on their lives to come to minister here. Jeff and Colleen arrived in

Pembrokeshire this year, 138 years after his great-grandfather had left, knowing that God had called them back to this land to seek Him for the healing and renewal of His people in Wales.

"We personally feel like such unlikely people," Colleen smiles. "And we know that is often how the Welsh have felt through history. But we really feel that God sees and knows Wales so well, and has a beautiful plan for how He wants to work through His people here."

Currently serving Bethel Baptist Church in Pembroke Dock, they are excited for the future as they seek God's next steps, and are ready to follow God's call however He leads them here in Wales!



STEPS OF HOPE

christian aid

At the end of October, the **WALK! Wales & Zimbabwe challenge** was completed. The challenge to walk 750+ miles was surpassed as we fundraised for the Talents of Hope appeal (p. 8). Here is **Llinos'** story...



Wales is our **spiritual health**. When do we have the opportunity to meditate and to pray? We are so busy trying to complete our tasks, meet expectations... have we forgotten how to look after the health of our souls?

My name is Llinos Penfold. I am a member at Bethel Church, Mynachlog-ddu and started working as BUW Corporation Co-ordinator in July. When the opportunity came to contribute to the WALK! challenge, with the aim of walking the length of Wales & Zimbabwe, which is a total of 750 miles, I was eager to take part! I was able to pledge 100 miles for the challenge over the summer.

Walking has played an important part in my life for years, ever since we got a very enthusiastic little dog called Caio back in 2015! There is no doubt that walking is beneficial to your physical health. Doctors believe that walking regularly can help to withstand the chances of heart attack, stroke, diabetes... the list goes on! But what about the effect on your mental health? In my experience, going for a walk in the fresh air can completely change the course of your day. Sometimes if I am tired or feeling low, half an hour outside can improve my mood significantly, help lift those dark clouds, and put those worries in context. Something that we do not give enough attention to in modern

And yet, walking is **such a great opportunity to talk to God**. Often, when I walk the Wales Coastal Path and face a challenging part, I will try and remember Psalms that I've memorized, or the words of hymns that have stayed in my memory since youth.

'So, where did you walk this year?', I hear you asking. I am sorry to disappoint you, but the majority of my walks this year have been around my home in Mynachlog-ddu! My husband and I also spent a week walking the Anglesey coast in August, and I also re-walked parts of the Pembrokeshire coastal path. I am very fond of the walk from Marloes to Dale, around Barafundle beach and from Porthgain to Abereddy. Well done to everyone who has contributed miles towards this target. I hope that new habits will continue, and that you will become regular walkers!

If you have not yet had the opportunity to support the appeal, remember that there is still an opportunity to give and to support walkers like Llinos before the end of December 2024.

(More information on www.buw.wales)

New Ministers and BUW Staff

It is with great joy that two former members of the Action Wales Team (BUW's gap year programme) were ordained and inducted as ministers in October this year! **Gruffudd Jenkins** (below, right) was welcomed at Maescanner Church, Dafen on the 5th of October, while **Hannah Smethurst** (below, left) was inducted on the 12th of October in Caersalem, Caernarfon. A welcome also to the **Rev. Richard Miles** to Llanwenarth Baptist Church! **Llinos Penfold** was welcomed to the **BUW staff** in July, and we said farewell to **Sioned Graves** in October as she starts her maternity leave.



Baptisms and New Life!

A call was put out in October asking whether baptisms had been taking place across our churches recently... There was a good response, with many reporting young people being baptised recently in churches across Wales! We first heard from Deer Park church, Tenby, where two were baptised in August and September. In August, Jeany, who had recently come to faith was baptized after exploring the Christian faith with the leaders of the church. At the same time, God was at work in Bunty's heart who had started coming to church for a year and a half. She also realised that she (cont...)

A new missional work in Haverfordwest



The **Welsh Christian witness in Pembrokeshire** has been a matter of concern to many in recent years. Over the past year, however, a small group have felt the call to establish a new work in Haverfordwest to reach the catchment area of Ysgol Caer Elen, with the vision of reaching Welsh learners, families and young people. The result has been the launch of a new Welsh-language service, starting on a monthly basis in Haverfordwest on the 1st Sunday of each month.

The seven who share the vision, including BUW President Geraint Morse (Welsh-language wing), have been meeting monthly to pray and plan for this new missional project. The project is called "Rhwyd y Brenin" (meaning "the Net of the King"), and the vision is to share the good news of Jesus in Haverfordwest and south Pembrokeshire through the medium of Welsh.

On the 6th of October, the leadership team of Rhwyd y Brenin met to pray before welcoming the first visitors to the opening service. There were 30 present, including 8 children and 22 adults. A lovely service was held on the theme of "Thanksgiving". Geraint said: "We are deeply indebted to the BUW staff for their guidance and support, and to Emmanuel Merlins Bridge church for all their support in opening the chapel doors to welcome us. We would appreciate your support in prayer – and if you happen to be free on the first Sunday afternoon of the month and would like to call in, you would be most welcome!" *For more details, contact Geraint Morse on 07805 617555*



Talents of Hope

In September 2023, we launched the Talents of Hope appeal, BUWs joint appeal with Christian Aid. The aim of the appeal is to support communities in Zimbabwe that are on **the frontline of the fight against Climate Change**, by training farmers in 'climate-smart' agriculture and trading. The BUW staff had the opportunity to hear from the Christian Aid Zimbabwe team recently as the work has **seen success** among farmers – even amid a serious drought and hunger crisis in the region.

By October (at the time of writing), **£15,645.86** had been raised. We have seen many creative fundraising efforts, including the WALK! Wales & Zimbabwe challenge - the Baptist family's attempt to walk the length of Wales and Zimbabwe: c.750 miles. In October, the target was passed, with **1090.35 miles** logged! It has been great to see churches coming together to take part in the challenge, including Penygroes churches, Mount Pleasant, the Carn Ingli circle, Ebenezer Dyfed, Sarn Newtown, and others. Thank you to everyone who hosted services, or raised money in other ways. There is still an opportunity to contribute **before the end of the appeal** in December. *For more information, head to www.buw.wales*

EBF: “A Change of Era”

Judith Morris recounts her experience joining Baptists from across Europe at the European Baptist Federation (EBF) Conference in Budapest, Hungary this September...

It was wonderful attending the annual conference of the European Baptist Federation (EBF) this year in Budapest. We received a special welcome from the Hungarian Baptist Union, a union consisting of around 300 churches with 20,000-25,000 members who worship every Sunday. The Federation is made up of **Baptists from the Middle East and Central Asia as well as Europe**. There was good representation and everyone was in good spirits. However, naturally the **ongoing wars** in Syria, Ukraine and Russia cast a shadow over the conference, along with reports of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno Karabakh and sad developments in the Middle East. We continue to pray for these countries along with those offering humanitarian assistance.

(‘Baptisms...’ cont.)

wanted to be baptised and then subsequently took the step of baptism on the 1st of September in Tenby harbour!



In September, **several young people** were baptised across our churches. In Cardiff, Aled was baptised - a young man who had recently joined Tabernacl Caerdydd. At Carmel Pontlliw, Harrison was baptized by his minister, Rev. H. Vincent Watkins with great joy on the 15th of September. At Pencarneddi Star, there was excitement as 5 young people confessed their Christian faith and were baptised on the 22nd of September. This was also a real occasion of joy as this was the first time the chapel had seen baptisms since 1990. Praise God that He is continuing to work in young hearts across Wales!

NEWS *the* from across *world*

The conference was a mix of plenary sessions and various workshops. It was good to see **young leaders** in attend-



-ance and hear about dedicated efforts to reach a new generation with the Gospel message. In addition, we were challenged to invest in the work of children and young people.

The theme of the conference was 'A Change of Era' and this is certainly a theme that applies to Baptists across Europe and beyond. Secularism, polarisation and the rise in political support for the far-right are a source of concern for many countries. Despite all the changes we face today, we were reminded many times that our focus is on **the One who is unchanging**, our Lord Jesus, and that we must follow his example, remembering how he emptied himself for the sake of the world.

Getting to know...

Gwyn Morgan



In this edition of 'Getting to know', we hear Gwyn Morgan's story and meditations on his faith and life journey. Well-known as an author for children in Welsh, Gwyn is also part of the Baptist family in Penderyn...

Thank you for sharing your story with us, Gwyn!

Could you share with us a little about your life and faith journey?

I was born and raised in Trecynon, Aberdare. I was a committed member of Noddfa Baptist Church, Trecynon. I was educated at Ysgol Gymraeg Ynyslwyd, Aberdare and Ysgol Gyfun Rhydfelen. I then went to Trinity College, Carmarthen and earned a teacher's certificate. I became a teacher at Gilfach Fargoed Primary Schools; Ynyswen, Rhondda Fawr and at Ysgol Gymraeg Ynyslwyd. I'm a children's author and I've published several volumes of poetry.

I had a remarkable upbringing as an only child and the apple of my parents' eyes. My father suffered greatly from an illness called pneumoconiosis which influenced me greatly. I realised then that life was fragile. My friends who were atheists refined my belief like anything. I'm so grateful to them! Christianity has been central to my life since then. It was an opportunity for me to deepen my experience and knowledge of God's eternal love towards me and others. The words of Ieuan Glan Geirionydd's simile come to me vividly in his hymn 'Ar lan Iorddonen Ddofn' ('On the Banks of the Jordan Deep'):-

"Paham yr ofnaf mwy / Yduw a'i daliodd hwy / A'm harwain innau drwy / Ei dyfroedd dyfnion"

(Why do I still fear? / The God who held them / Has led me through / Its deep waters.)

A number of chapels have come together in Hirwaun and Penderyn to worship twice a month. I am deeply blessed by the fellowship - we are

active in the community through litter picking, local food banks and organising concerts!

What are the most important lessons you feel you have learned over your life and faith journey?

The force of the parables and the truth of the word crystallise the depth of my experience of being a part of society. God's love begs us to act on his behalf. I struggle to believe in Christ the king coming on clouds, but I resonate with Christ the brother, the co-pilgrim – that's real to me. He identifies with us in our weaknesses.

The Word has to make practical sense to me in terms of how to forgive one another, how to know God through Christ, and the recognition of Christ in us and in others. I believe that scripture is not just something bound to history but that God reveals himself to us today.

As someone who is very fond of the humour of Monty Python, The Marx Brothers, Spike Milligan, the Goons etc and takes pleasure in listening to Jazz – I find they tie very different forces together in unity. This is the spirit that whispers that God's peace and sense of humour is in us still.

Looking ahead, what is your prayer for Aberdare, and for Wales?

My prayer is for the seed of the Word to germinate in the hearts and minds of humanity, and for that to bring forth the fruit of justice, peace, light, gentleness, respect for others, warm friendship, compassion and a spirit of forgiveness – or in other words, Christ in us.

Diolch, Gwyn!