

SPRING 2025  
ISSUE 31

*The*

# Messenger

'Going Wild' in Talgarth  
New Missional CIOs  
Celebrating the Nicene Creed  
*and more...*

# Editorial

SPRING 2025

*note*

*"He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains" Psalm 104:10*

At the time of writing these words, the bright spring sunshine is belied slightly by dark news from around the world. But the verse serves as one Biblical reminder among so many of **God's hand at work bringing life** in dark places. And this edition of *The Messenger* as it has come together reflects that, with an array of buds of new life emerging across the breadth of Baptist life in Wales.

That includes, hopefully, the results of the survey about **openness to Christian faith** among Welsh adults reported to our ministers at their annual conference (see p.6); the new connections with families being forged through **'Go Wild' in Talgarth** (pp.4-5), the work on forming **new missional CIOs** (p.3 opposite) and the growing interest in ICE Wales's work from schools (p.8). Even in the midst of severe adversity, **BMS partners** in Ukraine testify to an amazing work of God among them, as new churches are planted – with a report from one on p.7.

There had been no deliberate editorial decision to pull together a 'hopeful edition' at a dark and uncertain time for the world – but as this issue came together, it became clear that there was this golden thread of hope. It is, as the Psalm reminds us, ultimately the hope of **God's active work** in the world.

We expect there to be plenty of encouragement as **we gather together** for our various annual conferences this summer. For those interested in joining us at the Welsh-language wing's conference in London on 19th and 20th June – please contact the office for booking details via [post@ubc.cymru](mailto:post@ubc.cymru)

We also extend a warm invitation to churches and families in Wales to **Momentum 2025** - a day of celebration, workshops for all ages and worship. Join us in a special day for the entire family as we celebrate the gift of the spirit to the church, yesterday, today and tomorrow! With a range of guest speakers (including main speaker: Belle Tindall from 'Seen and Unseen' podcast) and a wide choice of sessions, there will be something for everyone on the day. **Order your tickets** before 20th April for Early Bird Pricing! Full details and early bird tickets now for sale here: [Momentum 2025 - 'Come Holy Spirit!' Tickets, Sat, Jun 7, 2025 at 10:00 AM | Eventbrite](#)

Finally, we are delighted to have been able to raise funds for the Zimbabwe Christian Aid Appeal, 'Talents of Hope', over the course of the last 18 months – and are very pleased to report that **in excess of £25,000** was raised! We had more than one opportunity to talk online with some of Christian Aid's partners in Zimbabwe and hear first-hand about the difficulties that exist there. We very much hope that our contribution towards the development of new approaches to agriculture in the face of climate change will make a difference and we continue to pray for the situation there.

*In Christ,*

**Carwyn Graves**

(Missions and Communications Officer, Maternity Cover)

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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:

## *Missional CIOs*

**BUW's Honorary Legal Counsel, Iwan Davies, tells us about exciting plans afoot to establish new regional Charitable Incorporated Organisations focusing on mission...**

The Baptist Union of Wales is working on establishing new regional Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) across Wales. These four or five CIOs will provide a robust legal framework to tackle the challenges highlighted in the 2041 Report particularly in employment, finance, and property matters at Association level. This initiative aims to better equip us as Baptists in Wales for contemporary Christian mission. In so doing we are encouraged by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians 4:12, "He did this to prepare his people for good works, so that the body of Christ can be built up".

Each CIO's Constitution will encapsulate the identity and convictions of the Welsh Baptist family, built on the Christian faith as expressed in historic Baptist discernment and principles. These constitutions will include plans for ministry and mission, encouraging churches to work together, supporting local church activities, organising worship, providing religious education, pastoral care, outreach, community service, and other charitable efforts that reflect mission in our contemporary context.

A mission roadmap will be an essential element in the work of these new, regional CIOs. The focus must be upon working with and between Associations, churches and the wider Baptist community, fostering growth and unity of Gospel engagement. We will need to form teams, set objectives and work together for "clear gain" which was historically the principle adopted by Baptist Associations in Wales for any new initiative.

Over the coming months, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, regional CIOs will engage in various areas of mission planning. This will involve at the regional level deliberate work to identify what we are currently doing; our plans are for the next few years; what resources are needed to assist and the sort of fruit we are working towards. In this planning process we can learn from each other and share ideas for our mission roadmap. As we develop this at a regional level, we will look to:

- Assemble teams of dedicated, diverse individuals who can bring unique perspectives to the table.
- Chart regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- Direct work to support the CIO and implement a regionally focussed mission strategy.

In championing this work we are looking in faith beyond the data projections in the 2041 Report. Our response to the data charting numerical decline is to build up unity of purpose in the task of celebrating our role as disciples and ambassadors of Christ and His church. We are called to tell our story with confidence and to equip ourselves further for Christian outreach, mission and service. New structures fit for the 21st century can aid us as churches and believers in this high calling.

Above all we are called to prayer, as individuals, churches and Associations, in everything we do to build up the Kingdom as we continue to share the joy of knowing Jesus and His Gospel.



# GOING WILD IN TALGARTH...

*"This is a very rural community," Paul and Robyn explain over coffee in their home in Talgarth, "and that means there are networks of connections and life experiences that people have around here which are quite different to a more urban setting!"*



## A Rural Setting

Paul and Robyn Smethurst moved to Breconshire two years ago, following God's call to serve as Missional Ministers in the local Baptist Association. As part of this, they shepherd the small congregation at Penyrheol, three miles out of Talgarth. Like many nonconformist chapel buildings across Wales, the buildings at Penyrheol are set in a deeply rural setting – in this case, commanding stunning views over the mountains and vales of Bannau Brycheiniog. Many members at the chapel had long since felt that something more could be done of the location to engage with the wider community but were unsure what. "We quickly felt that Penyrheol would be a perfect setting to try out Scripture Union's 'Go Wild' club idea."

*"the idea behind Go Wild is very simply to explore creation together with children - and introduce them to the Creator"*

Developed over recent years, the idea behind Go Wild is very simply to explore creation together with children – and through that to help them get thinking about the Creator. With a large and interesting outdoor space and converted chapel 'Stable' (i.e. small vestry) at Penyrheol, and a number of families with historic connections to the chapel, the ingredients were clearly there to try out the idea.

## Go Wild! Club

They launched the club in May of 2023, with four families coming along and everyone getting involved in building a bug hotel together. As the Smethursts explain, the format is simple; to take a creation-related theme each month (water, trees etc.), to explore it in a funny, messy, hands-on way – and then to build on that with a spiritual exploration.

"It's great fun – and doing that hands-on work together, whether that's wildflower seed bombs, making blackberry ink or woodwork – draws everyone in and allows us to build that community. Conversations can then take place naturally, from day-to-day chit chat through to much more spiritually significant ones," Paul explains.



*Enjoying Creation at Penyrheol during 'Go Wild'*

## Connection

Over time, the group has grown organically to nine families, and the Smethursts are clear that it was always the hope that this would be a means of engaging with entire families – not just the children, or the parents or the grandparents. “As relationships have deepened, the spiritual element has also deepened. We’ve been able to go from introducing the concept of prayer, for instance, to telling a Bible story related to one of our themes. And there’s been a natural crossover starting between the club and chapel services at Christmas or Easter, for instance.”



One of the unanticipated fruits of this has been an unexpected invitation to run a parallel Go Wild club at the local primary school. Robyn explains how they now run a weekly after-school club there, and though the content has to be simpler, it's still already proven to be a significant means of building relationships.

The work of discerning where the spirit is moving locally continues – but the Smethursts are encouraged that a community of young families is now meeting regularly at beautiful Penyrheol chapel amid the glories of mid-Wales' creation - and that they are starting to discover who its Creator may be.

# ESGYN THROUGH THE STORM



*In the last edition we shared about plans to invite teenagers from churches across Wales to gather for the second 'Esgyn' weekend - a new initiative. Here is **Sian Elin Thomas**' report...*

Once again in **November** a small group of us set out to organise an Esgyn weekend (Welsh for 'Ascend') for young people, following the buzz and blessing experienced during the first in February. Through God's blessing and recruitment work from the team in their areas, over 40 names came into the BUW office, some returning for a second time and some new, and all very much looking forward to travelling to Treharris.

There are several **special things about Esgyn**. Teenagers coming together to enjoy and worship Jesus. Enthusiastic young leaders show the crew what following Jesus offers. And one other thing that's important to the whole team is the fact that Esgyn is bilingual and **there's a place for Welsh as well as English in the worship and activities**.

Yes, the deluge came through 'Storm Bert', and everyone was soaking wet as they went about archery, venturing on the high ropes and the climbing wall

But despite the weather, there was a special spirit in this group that had come together. And beyond the enjoyment of the activities, a feeling of special solidarity came over the group, both young people and leaders, during the worship sessions. The young people came to understand that by **becoming followers of Jesus**, by trusting in our Lord there is new hope, even in the storm of life.

No one is quite sure what's to come for this exciting project, but one thing is for sure, we feel that God is behind it and blessed the whole weekend, despite the storm that came our way. We ask everyone to **pray for the future of Esgyn**, as we are convinced that it has something to offer the future of the church in Wales.

*Sian-Elin Thomas, Crymych*

# NEWS FROM across



## Office News

After eighteen years of meetings, work and prayer in the offices at Y Llwyfan, Carmarthen, the Baptist Union of Wales was informed by our landlord at the end of 2024 that we would have to move venue by Easter of this year.

An intensive period of office-hunting revealed a potential new home for the Union a stone's throw away from our current premises, at Parc Dewi Sant, Carmarthen. The site is a former mental health hospital, with a large number of other tenant organisations including Hywel Dda Health Board, Swansea University, Llyfrau Llafar Audiobooks Charity, Cegin y Bobl and several others. Free parking is available on site and a café serving lunch.

BUW staff will be moving the archives and property over during the week of 7th to 11th April and we thank everyone for your understanding during that time!

BUW's new address will be:

*Baptist Union of Wales,  
Parc Dewi Sant,  
Job's Well Road,  
Carmarthen SA31 3HG*



We also welcome Mrs Beci Jones as a new member of staff working in finance, who will be starting on a full-time basis in June.

## Signs of Spring?

Around 70 ministers, chaplains and pioneers gathered from across South Wales Baptist Association and the Baptist Union of Wales in February for our joint ministers' conference. General Secretary of BUGB, Lynn Green, opened the conference reflecting on the 'foolish power of God' from 1 Corinthians, before statistics were shared by Rachel Jordan-Wolf from a large survey carried out by Hope Together.

This shows that nearly half the population of Wales are happy to tell a pollster they are potentially open to Christian faith; and over 62% of non-Christians in our country know a Christian. Overall Rachel's message was clear... we should be encouraged. People are open to hearing about Jesus and when they do, they are responding.

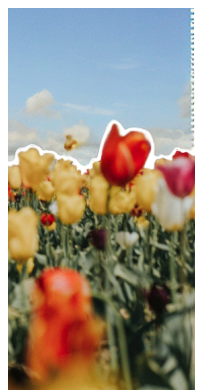
*"We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is seen and unseen.*

*"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God..."*

## Celebrating the Nicene Creed

This year sees the 1700th anniversary of the **Nicene Creed**, that has been so important in defining concisely core Christian beliefs ever since. Conferences and celebrations have been organised worldwide (e.g. 'Gather 25', the World Council of Churches and other alliances) with events here in Wales too.

We took the opportunity as a Union at our **annual Ilston service** to reflect on the significance of the Nicene creed for us as Welsh Baptists in the 21st century, under the guidance of our past President, Dr D Densil Morgan. As Densil explained, 'were we to unpack it, the simple phrase 'Jesus is Lord' – which conveys both Christ's deity and his humanity – leads logically and emphatically to the Doctrine of the Trinity. Far from being an heretical sect, the Baptist Union of Wales is a small though not insignificant part of Christ's Body, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic church. That is why we can join with our fellow Christians throughout the world in giving thanks for the Nicene Creed."





*Alona and Oleg in their new church building*

## Refugees coming to faith in Ukraine

After nearly **three years of war**, it could be easy for Ukrainian Christians to be hopeless and despairing – but, amazingly, they're finding hope in some of the most unexpected places. The response of BMS and Ukrainian Baptists has now shifted to focus more on those remaining in their communities and internally displaced people, like Alona and Oleg.

Alona and Oleg are from Luhansk, a region now occupied by Russia. Alona is a teacher and Oleg is a pastor and church planter. When the invasion first began, they fled with just a grab bag to Kyiv. With nowhere to go and no family with them, they didn't know where to turn – until they found **a local Baptist church that was offering support** to displaced people.

At the peak of the war, churches in Kyiv were welcoming over 1,000 people a day seeking refuge. Not only did Alona and Oleg receive hot food and vital medicine – they found a community who could support them when they needed it most. And Oleg could see that people also needed a sign of hope during the horrors they were facing, so as soon as he could he began **preaching and serving refugees in need**, showing them that they had a God of peace and justice they could believe in.

## NEWS from across

Two years on, the owners of a casino nearby left the country – leaving an ideal space for Alona and Oleg to **plant a new church**. The bar has been repurposed into a kitchen, and there's plenty of space for the congregation and children's groups to share fellowship together. And their conviction of God's plans and faithfulness for their community led to the ideal name: God's Design Church.

The heart behind the church is to emulate the support Alona and Oleg received when they first arrived in Kyiv: "those who come to church come first because of humanitarian assistance," says Oleg. Since the church's official founding two years ago, **36 people have been baptised** and they have 90 regular attendees on a Sunday. It's a beautiful thing to behold, seeing how the Lord is at work and transforming lives in the mess of war – and, thanks to your support, it's something BMS is seeing across the whole of Ukraine.

*Laura Durrant, BMS World Mission*

*Find a fuller version of this report on BMS's website.*



# Getting to know...

## Chris Thomas



In this edition of 'Getting to know', we hear Chris Thomas's story and involvement in establishing and running ICE Wales. Familiar to many in the Gwent Baptist Association, we started by asking Chris about her journey to faith...

### **It's lovely to meet you, Chris! Tell us a little about how you came to faith?**

I had the privilege of being brought up at Tirzah Baptist, Cwm near Ebbw Vale but I can remember clearly the time when it all came to life for me through a preacher using the illustration of a penny! A coin becomes dirty as it gets handed on from person to person but can then become good as new by going back to the mint – somehow that spoke to me about the truth of the gospel and I was baptized at age 11.

### **You've been very involved over your lifetime in sharing Christian faith with children. How did that come about?**

After living in Swansea for 15 years, my husband and I moved to Rogerstone, and we had a strong desire to be involved in church life. We became members at Bethesda, Rogerstone twenty-five years ago. I eventually became part of the outreach team majoring on children and schools' work, which was great. But there was a particular point when I spoke to the head at the local primary school, who had had bad experiences with people from churches in the past. And that's where the seed for ICE (Initiatives in Christian Education) Wales came from – a body that could do Christian work in schools with the credibility and the structures to work well within the requirements of the education sector. There was also a vision of Wales, and a wheel with spokes. It's been amazing to see how the work has grown from Rogerstone to now cover much of south-eastern Wales

### **Tell us a bit about ICE Wales and what you do?**

It started out with assemblies, then lunchtime Bible clubs – and it's grown from there. We always work with local churches. We train their volunteers to lead the sessions in schools. That's really important – it's local Christians working with their local schools, serving them and building up strong relationships with them.

We're not allowed to go into schools and preach – but we can go and explore stories from the Bible. So we've developed lessons, workshops and use the internationally known Walk Through the Bible resources. Now with the new Welsh curriculum and the 'cynefin' (local area) theme, we've been able to develop resources about Mary Jones, Florrie Evans and Robert Jermaine Thomas – linking their lives with Welsh culture, the world, the Bible and Christianity. These have proved to be very popular!

### **You've clearly been immersed in this. Tell us how this has encouraged you in your Christian walk?**

There are so many encouragements. Just recently, for instance, a local grandmother came up to me in Tesco's and asked whether I'd been doing the Bible stories with the children in school. Her grandson had come home and told her the story with enthusiasm. I've been in the local hospital and had a doctor turn around and repeat the story of Genesis to me with the hand signs we'd taught her when she was in school. I believe the Holy Spirit takes these Bible stories, fixes them in children's minds – and those seeds will grow in the fullness of time.

*Thank you, Chris. Why not take a moment to pray for the work of ICE Wales? And if you would like to partner with them in your locality, you can contact through their website: [www.icewales.co.uk](http://www.icewales.co.uk)*