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The background of the cover is a photograph of a field of tall, golden-brown grass in the foreground. In the middle ground, there is a line of trees and a large, leafy tree on the right side. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the overall lighting suggests a warm, golden hour or sunset.

The Messenger

Called to community
A new future for chapel buildings?
The Quiet Revival
and more...



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ISSUE 32

Editorial

SUMMER 2025

note

*"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine"*

Isaiah 43:1

These verses are originally **words of comfort** spoken by God through the prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel at a time of threat and confusion. The mighty Assyrian empire was encroaching, and yet they knew the promises of God to one day bring a Messiah, and redemption. As Christians in Wales over many decades we have known something of that same dynamic. We have held on to the many comforts God has given us, even as great changes within and without the church have led to feelings of threat and worry.

The **annual conferences** this summer have echoed February's Ministers' conference in sounding a note of reassurance against this backdrop. As we reflect in this edition's Mission Column (page 3), since the last issue of The Messenger the signs of spiritual change afoot have grown. That was reflected in the news of Easter Baptisms (page 6) and in the Botwoods' experience with Beulah chapel in Radnorshire (page 5).

We are also now seeing green shoots from the hard work many have put in at the BUW Corporation, with a new future within the Baptist family for a growing number of our historic chapel buildings (page 4). Finally, we bring **stories of resilience** in the global church (page 7) and get to know the faith of two stalwarts from our Denbigh, Flint and Meirioneth Association on page 8.

We also extend a warm invitation to this year's annual **Ilston Service** - at the memorial at Ilston in Gower, where the first Baptist church in Wales was planted in 1649 as part of a wider Baptist church planting movement. The Baptist Union of Wales has long held an annual commemorative service either at the site or in recent years online. This year's service will be on the theme of 'Tarian Ffydd / **The Shield of Faith**', with contributions from local churches and ministers, and under the care of Rev Rob Nicholls.

The service is held at the site of **the ruins of Ilston Church**, Parkmill, Gower. If the weather is unfavourable, at the Scouts Hall (the old school) nearby at 2pm on Saturday 19th July.

We also extend a warm welcome to **young people** to the third *Esgyn* weekend in November. A bilingual two-day event for young people, the last two events have laid strong foundations for the future. If young people in your church or family haven't yet had the opportunity to come, bookings are open now - turn to page 6 to find out more!

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:

A Quiet Revival?

In the previous edition of The Messenger we reported tentatively on 'signs of spring' that seemed to be emerging across the BUW family, as churches reported more baptisms and higher levels of openness to Christian faith than for a number of years...

That pattern seems to be confirmed by similar reports from other denominations across the British Isles, and a widely reported survey by the Bible Society undertaken in conjunction with pollsters YouGov.

The main finding of this striking survey is that 'church decline in England and Wales has not only stopped, but the Church is growing, as Gen Z (under 30s) lead an exciting turnaround in church attendance.'

What is particularly clear is that some of this openness is coming from the younger generations, who for the most part have grown up without any meaningful connection to cultural Christianity. There also seems to be a hunger for the 'strangeness' of faith in a world of screens.

This new phenomenon has been greeted by both hype and criticism – as the history of the church might lead us to expect!

"This new phenomenon has been greeted by both hype and criticism"



Although caution is warranted, the methodology here of surveying over 13,000 individuals using the rigorous approach of a political polling company means these results can be taken to back up what many of us are seeing on the ground – not flocks and droves, but ones and twos turning up and wanting to know more about Jesus Christ and his good news.

As we heard at both Welsh and English language annual conferences, and as the reports of Easter Baptisms (see report on page 6) across BUW churches attest, we are feeling the effects of this spiritual openness in our denomination.

In the words of a recent commentator; 'If the "quiet revival" is merely a matter of desiring the whiff of incense or a lively praise band, it will quickly pass, offering nothing of substance to our culture.' There is a sobering and helpful reminder here. But Lynn Green, General Secretary of BUGB, struck another helpful note in reflecting on this change, encouraging Christians to "praise the Lord for the gracious growth that, together, we are seeing".

Whatever the coming seasons hold, we can all be encouraged by the very real reports of people seeking Jesus and finding new life in him. It should spur us all to humility, to prayer – and perhaps also to an openness to the unexpected as God moves.



Giving Chapel buildings a new future...

*"We haven't had to go looking for a single tenant – they've come to us," explains **Christian Tucker-Williams**, Senior Coordinator of the BUW Corporation. For some years now the Corporation has been pursuing a new strategy when a church closes and a chapel building loses its original purpose. Now this strategy is starting to bear fruit, with encouraging examples developing in different parts of the country...*

Tabor

Membership numbers were declining at Tabor, and as the church started to think about the future they approached BUW for advice early in the process. Christian went to meet them and helped them consider different options for the way forward. Eventually, it became clear in this case that bringing the church cause to an end would be the best option – but it was obvious that the site had real potential and church members wanted to see good use of the building, and supported Union staff to assess the different possibilities.

In June 2024 Menter Iaith Cwm Gwendraeth Elli – a local Welsh language social enterprise - took a 5-year lease on the vestry at Tabor and set about creating a Welsh-language community hub there, drawing the community into the work as they did so. As Alaw, the Enterprise Manager, explained when we visited, "We're really happy here. It's worked so well for children and young people – the place is busy pretty much every day now!" As well as a 'Meals on Wheels' service providing fresh food to people in their homes in the surrounding villages, there are yoga sessions in Welsh, an afterschool kids' club, a youth theatre, mums and tots group and a host of local associations hiring the space – as well as parents using it for parties!

"What we've enjoyed too," says Alaw as she shows us the Community Garden that is now developing outside the vestry, "is that we have former members of the church who used to meet here regularly come here as well – it's lovely that they're part of the new chapter!" In coming to an agreement with the Menter Iaith, the Union ensured in the lease that a number of hours a week of use of the building remained with the Baptist family, and is looking into creative, Christian possibilities for the future at the site.



Gorseinon – Seion Noddfa

"It was a real privilege and encouragement to be invited to the service for the reopening of the Seion building – albeit with a new church congregation! As a result, a larger church is now providing a Christian witness in the middle of Gorseinon's high street," Christian shared.

Seion Noddfa was originally founded as a daughter church of Penuel church, Loughor in 1899. The congregation was shrinking, particularly after the two years of Covid, and similarly to Tabor, the members decided to reach out to the Union to discuss the situation and the future. All options were considered and prayed over – and the members decided that they were being led to return to the mother church and formally unite both congregations, creating Penuel Newydd church (which now meets on Penuel's site in Gorseinon).

That left Seion's site on the high street – which had once seen Billy Graham preaching on a visit to Wales – standing empty. Riverside Christian Fellowship had been worshipping at the Institute in Gorseinon, without a home of its own. It just so happened one day around this time that one of the leaders of Penuel Newydd bumped into one of the officers of Riverside in the local supermarket, and that led to the unexpected idea of leasing Seion's building to Riverside. They as a church now meet there weekly on Sundays and run midweek activities from the high street location as well.

Other churches

That is not the only example where it's been possible to lease a chapel building to a congregation of another denomination that had no home of its own. Not far from Gorseinon in the town of Pontarddulais the cause of Y Babel Baptist church had ended, and the property had passed into the care of the BUW Corporation. Carmel Apostolic church heard locally about this and asked if they could rent the space, coming to a 10-year lease agreement with the BUW Corporation in the summer of 2024. Discussions of a similar nature are currently taking place in relation to the Zion building, Llanwrtyd Wells in mid-Wales also. As Christian notes, "We have to put these buildings to good use – that may not always mean leasing out to a church, but the key thing is that we reuse these buildings for the sake of the future and our mission, unlocking the investment and sacrifice our forefathers made in erecting them, for the cause of Christ today!"

CALLED TO COMMUNITY

"There's never been a separation here between the church and the community – many people are just deeply part of both!" After a long and multinational journey, God has led Tudor and Nicola Thomas-Botwood back to the rural community of Llidiart-y-waen near Rhayader in Mid-Wales. And as they and the church explore the next steps, the word 'community' seems to be at the heart...

Called back

"I grew up around here in a farming family," Tudor explains, "but our careers in army chaplaincy had taken Nicola and me all over the place." When his mother had an accident towards the end of the Covid period, it became clear that they needed to find ways to support her by living nearer. As it happens, Tudor's first pastorate decades previously had included Beulah, Llidiart-y-waen, and when the church found out about the move they invited Nicola to take services.

"Before long the church wanted a conversation with us about joint ministry – and we had to tell them we weren't ready," Nicola says with a chuckle. "And they said - 'tell us when you're ready then!'" Eventually, they came to an agreement around a shared, part-time ministry with this small rural church of twelve members, and large extended families.

Rural community

"The area has changed more quickly than usual since Covid," Tudor explains, "we've got people around here now who go back four or five generations – and then on the other hand people who've only been here four or five years." But it seems like many of the newcomers to mid-Wales were looking to join a community, and in an area like this the importance of community has never really diminished.

"The key is being involved locally," Nicola goes on. Both Thomas-Botwoods quickly got involved with various groups and initiatives in the area, including the Rhayader running club, the local nursing home, St John's Ambulance and schools' work. "It helps enormously with people's perception, and everything is linked in a community like this. So you're doing an assembly in a primary school one day, then you might be helping one of those kids' grandmother the next through St John's. Our church ministry is part-time, and that gives us time to be involved in other things as volunteers, not just 'ministers'."

A growing church community?

Tradition is clearly a strong part of church life at Beulah, which has a small older chapel building surrounded by green fields and hills. But as Tudor says, "the church is very willing to experiment. The congregation is aware, I think, that we're ministering on the cusp of opportunity." Both children and youth work have grown of late, and in ones and twos they are seeing new people turn up, looking to find out more. In fact there is only one room for the childrens' work at the moment so as Nicola points out, 'we're not really trying to make things grow!'

They both reflect on the new spiritual openness around them – and what that means now in a church that has always been a key part of the close-knit society around it. "We don't have to think, 'oh, how do we reach these people?'" Tudor muses. "I took a funeral recently, and a couple there – they knew who I was because that's how it is around here – they asked me to go and visit them to talk about Christian faith." That is clearly an important part of the dynamic, with people bringing each other along.

"Look," Nicola finishes, "the church is leading here – or the Holy Spirit is. And when new or old faces turn up, they feel comfortable. There's a welcome for them! God does the rest."



NEWS FROM across



Office News

The BUW office **has now moved** from Y Llwyfan to Parc Dewi Sant - the address is noted on the back page.

We are delighted to **welcome back** Mrs Sioned Graves returning from maternity leave, and are glad that Mr Carwyn Graves will remain with us in a part-time capacity supporting Mission work.

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



Easter Baptisms

A host of Baptisms took place across Wales over the Easter weekend. Here's a snapshot of those stories:

Bethlehem, Spittal: "We held a baptismal service for a young woman who grew up in the church. Two more people came forward at the end of the service wanting to be baptised, so we'll be refilling the pool again soon!"

Bethesda, Neyland: "We were delighted to witness the first baptism in our Church for 20 years! This man has been searching all his life for answers. He walked into our church two years ago when the Spirit led him to want bible study - praise the Lord he has been changed, transformed, and made anew."

Johnston: "On Mother's Day a man brought his girlfriend to church and she received Christ as her Saviour. On Easter Sunday they were baptised together. They are facing challenges but learning to lean into Jesus and the church fellowship for strength and wisdom and growth. Praise the Lord!"

Esgyn returns!

After welcoming a crew of young people to Treharris twice in 2024, the Esgyn team are excited to announce that the next weekend will be held in November 2025!

Esgyn will be returning to the Rock UK Summit Centre in South Wales from the 21st – 23rd of November. The Esgyn team extend a warm **welcome to anyone aged 11-16** to join us in a new adventure this Autumn as we 'gather together to grow in faith, rising in hope for a new generation'!

Booking forms for November are **now live** on the Esgyn webpage and close in September – or when places are full! Book here: www.buw.wales/esgyn. For more info, you can contact the Esgyn team at esgyn@ubc.cymru or follow Esgyn's [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#) pages.



Church-planting in wartime Palestine

From the European Baptist Federation:

We continue to lift our hearts in prayer for peace in the Palestinian territories and in Israel. Though the conflict brings daily suffering and much of life has come to a standstill—travel halted, humanitarian aid delayed, communities torn—**the Church remains steadfast.**

Courageous church-planting families remain in the field, serving selflessly and bringing light to dark places. Today, we hear from one of these beautiful families whose ministry is transforming the lives of children and entire communities. Their dedication, even in the face of turmoil, is a testimony to the unstoppable power of the Gospel. In the midst of hardship, the Church continues to grow—not just in number, but in faith, hope, and love.

Church planters Basel and Gaida explain:

“We continue to hold weekly meetings, including gatherings for **children, youth, and women**, to strengthen and establish them in the faith. We have faced persecution and defamation from some individuals, which has affected the services and led to fewer people attending the meetings, especially children and youth. However, with God’s help and our faith in Him, we are persevering. We have felt His presence and are encouraged by the fruit we are harvesting in His field.

We continue to make **home visits to encourage** and comfort families in their faith. Fear still lingers in the community. However, people are open to hearing the Word of God. They are drawn to Bible studies and constantly ask us to return and discuss the Scriptures with them.”

Full story on the EBF website: [A Call to Unceasing Prayer and Unshakable Hope](#)



Church meeting in Palestine

NEWS from across *the world...*



New wave of community transformation through the church

Over recent years large sections of the church in the global south (formerly called ‘third world’) have energetically started working in their local communities, driven by **a vision of holistic mission**. As BMS workers in Uganda explain, ‘it begins with Bible study in a local church... then seeking out the resources God has granted them to transform their church family and wider community.’

This movement, sometimes called **CCM for ‘church and community mobilisation’** has grown to over 40 countries worldwide – most of them in areas of persistent and sometimes headline poverty. As Christian development charity Tearfund explains, “in communities around the world, church networks are reaching the most vulnerable people in areas where international charities cannot reach.”

Through the efforts of “church and community mobilisation, the local church works with its local community to identify and respond to their needs together.”

“Church mobilisation can be particularly appropriate in contexts where **Christians are a marginalised minority** without a voice in the community or where they are seeking to have a prophetic voice to change social norms.”

Getting to know...

Richard and Bethan Jones



In this edition of 'Getting to know', we hear Bethan and Richard Jones' stories and what keeps them going in a small rural chapel in north-east Wales. Familiar to many in the DFM Association, we started by asking both about their journeys to faith...

Lovely to meet you, Bethan and Richard! Can you share with us some of both of your faith journeys?

Bethan: I grew up in a very happy chapel and church community, going to Aion, Dolywern (Baptist) and to churches of other denominations with various family members! The ecumenical impulse has always been strong in me as a result.

Richard: I was also brought up in a Christian family, and I was baptized under the ministry of the Rev Gwilym Tilsley in Rhyl. I was encouraged to play the organ from a young age, and the Welsh hymns have always been an influence on me. I had a wider experience of Christian faith when I was a student in Manchester, where I had the opportunity to attend the church which was part of the hall of residence.

You're involved in all sorts of things in your community – can you give us a taste?

Bethan: I'm now secretary of Seion United Church, in Glyn Ceiriog! I'm a teacher by vocation and I've always enjoyed working with children. I help with the local Eisteddfodau, run a Sunday School in our chapel and organize our family services.

Richard: I'm also a teacher. I was led a few years ago to train as a visiting preacher and since then I have served in churches across all the Welsh denominations and find real satisfaction in doing so. That's us sounding the ecumenical note again!

What encouragements do you experience on a regular basis in your faith?

Bethan: Maybe it's the way people collaborate locally? We have a real team of people involved in the work of the church, people with different abilities contributing, and that's true of our services and the Sunday School – even though we don't have a minister. I would say that the faithfulness of our members really encourages me. Hopefully as we sow seeds we will see them bearing fruit over time!

Richard: I'm currently really looking forward to the privilege of playing the organ at the National Eisteddfod's Cymanfa Ganu in August! That closes a circle for me as Gwynfor Jones, my first organ teacher, from the chapel of my upbringing did the same thing at the 1985 Rhyl Eisteddfod. I have been immersed, to be honest, in our hymn tradition – the Welsh one and beyond (Bach etc.). There are real treasures there and it gives me another dimension to my faith, which is very important.

Thank you both, and every blessing on your diligent work and on the life of Seion United Church in Glyn Ceiriog.