

PARTNERS

The Usk Ministry Area Newsletter

SUMMER 2020



Many months have passed since the publication of the last issue of 'Partners' and without a doubt the past three months have been like none other in the history our parishes. During our recent 'Zoomed' MA Council meeting members agreed to share experiences; the contributions in this issue reflect the ways in which the church family in each parish has responded to the challenges of Covid 19 and the resulting lockdown.



Christchurch, Coed-y-paen

We have received the faculty to proceed with replacing the church roof but sadly due to Covid-19 the contractor is unable to start work at the moment. Hopefully he will be able to make progress soon. The Church yard has been looking wonderful since the beginning of spring and our hardworking village volunteers do a super job, we are so grateful to them all. Even though the church building is closed the community is keeping in touch and caring for each other. Some of our younger church members are shopping, making cakes and going the extra mile to look after the more senior among us which is greatly appreciated and makes a big difference.

We are all so lucky to have lovely gardens and good weather to enjoy them. We all look forward to the time when we can safely return to a more normal life and all meet up to enjoy our church together once again, planning events and services for the future

Cilla Davies



St Madoc's, Llanbadoc

We are pleased to report that all the blowers and humidifiers have been taken from the church and Red Shed so both interiors are clean and dry. We are gradually emptying the container of goods saved from the flood and storing them all in the Red Shed, we are hoping that the painter will be able to start work in there soon. We are very grateful to Morris' for mowing the grass in the churchyard, and sweeping the paths until everything gets back to normal. The quiet times have resulted in five nests in the porch and the squirrels seem to be enjoying the peace. Some of the parishioners are "going to church" on a Sunday morning by watching the service on television together, but in separate houses. I think we are all trying to adapt to this unusual way of life and keeping in touch by phone, email and waving as we pass people's houses.

Rosemary Evans



St. Cybi's, Llangybi

Although in March the overburdened River Usk came right over the water meadows that lie beyond our two churchyards, the only damage St Cybi's Church sustained was the storm's disruption of our electricity supply by causing a burnout in the equipment which receives our overhead cables. The damage was quickly discovered by a churchwarden and expertly and expeditiously repaired at dead of night by a team from Western Power. The congregation of St Madoc's

worshipped with us, while professional cleaners dealt with the flood damage to their church, and hoped to reopen for Easter Day which of course sadly did not happen. St Cybi's took over hosting rehearsals of the Byrdsong, a Capella choir, with the added bonus of their singing the Four Part Mass by William Byrd and an anthem at our service of Holy Eucharist on March 15th. The PCC recently received the latest Quinquennial Inspection Report. It held few surprises, as we all knew that facing up to the massive work needed to ensure the future of the rare medieval and 17th century paintings on the walls of the nave was on the cards. Past generations leave us treasures but also headaches. In the 1950s a well-meaning PCC became so frustrated waiting and waiting for the architect's instructions re the deteriorating stone work on the nave's ancient outside walls, they went ahead and had them pointed with cement, which has drawn damp into the structure and threatened the stability of our lovely paintings.

The congregation, like everyone else, has faced up to doing our best to protect ourselves from the dreaded outbreak of the corona virus by taking the wise precautionary advice of our Bench of Bishops. The closure of our church and Drop in Café, a necessary but painful decision, has moved ministry to other mediums: phoning those who are alone but not on social media and sending out emailed prayers, poems and thoughts for each Sunday to those who are. I lit the Pascal candle in my garden on Easter Eve and have celebrated Holy Communion at 8 am every Sunday with a congregation of one. We also sent some Doves of Hope flying in Llangybi. We long for churches to be open, if only for private prayer, but I notice that this week's Church Times cautions that even that would entail constantly going through the sanitising processes ordered for businesses and need an army of volunteers. Jesus warns us against letting anxiety take us over. St Matthew records Jesus as saying "Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (Matt.6.27) We must travel on hopefully, placing everything in the hands of God.

Pamela Love.

Llangybi in Lockdown

In a way, because of the layout of the village, Llangybi is a cluster of smaller communities, each looking after one another in their own ways. Since the heavy snow fall a couple of years ago, we have a village Facebook page on which notices and requests for help, missing pets etc. are posted.



Once the "lockdown" was announced confining us to the village except for approved purposes, our community spirit really came alive. Unlike in the larger communities, most of the services upon which we rely are a distance away.

Until lockdown, like many such communities we all got on with our private lives independently. Now it is different. Getting groceries, medication, visits to the doctor, are

now major undertakings. In all aspects of this willing volunteers have stepped forward with offers to do shopping, collect prescriptions, and generally offer help.

Our church congregation has become a small and largely elderly group, many of whom are not able to offer practical help in the community. It is of concern that those in most need are often the ones who do not use the easy routes to communication on the internet and can be left out of the local offers. We know who these are though, and neighbours are asked to pass on messages and keep in touch. It has also been a matter of regret that at a time of crisis access to the church has had to be denied.

It is often assumed that those living in rural locations are the privileged ones, and we are: but aware of the gifts we have: open space for walks, gardens, lower risk of infection. However, there is also hardship, grief, loneliness, anxiety and fear. In Usk a wonderful group of volunteers has set up a food collection and hot meals twice each week for families for whom times are hard; not only in Usk but in the surrounding area. We salute them.

Zoom has come into its own, with enterprising people doing quizzes and relaxation sessions, and we are all becoming much more familiar with the "Virtual" media. We all stop and talk to any one we meet, checking if they are well. Some people are finding they have time to do things they have not had time for until now.

This is a time of tragedy and great suffering. At the same time, it is an opportunity to re-evaluate the way we lived before against the way we live now. None of us knows what the future will bring, but my hope is that we can hold on to what we will have learned about ourselves and move into that future with a new awareness and a new simplicity.

Sue Hiscox



St. Peter, Paul & John, Llantrisant

Llantrisant in lockdown

The Parish of Llantrisant and Llanllowell is a large rather sparsely populated rural area with the church of St Peter, Paul & John, the former church of St Llywll and two churchyards all on the western edge.

If it were not for the enforced closure of the local pub, it would be hard for a casual visitor to realise the village and surrounding countryside were trapped in the midst of a deadly pandemic. But of course we do not get casual visitors rambling along the Usk Valley Way and none of the still frequent cyclists now stop. What is different is the extent to which even local communication is now so concentrated on electronic messaging: Sue set up a local ladies group on her iPhone

The enforced closure of the church building in practice only impacts on the very few members of its regular congregation who miss occasional collective Christian worship. What the Church misses is the opportunity to offer the church building as a community asset, aside from using the porch as a base for a local book exchange.

Llantrisant churchyard is a different matter. We have always relied on the support of local friends, none of them regular church goers, for grounds maintenance. Strimming, verging, mowing, tree-pruning, path spraying, bramble clearance, minor wall repairs.

With time on their hands jobs that have been “on the list” for years have been tackled. The churchyard also provided the one opportunity for households, within walking distance but keeping 2 meters apart, to happen to gather together to mark VE 75. Perhaps we should now start to partake in open air worship from the Preaching Cross!!??

Sandy Blair



St Andrew's, Tredunnoch

It was a bit of a shock for all of us in Tredunnoch that once “lockdown” was announced St Andrew's church was shut.

We are thankful that the Usk Ministry Team have been sending via email reflections and meditations and we have appreciated the services from Newport Cathedral.

Rowena Brace, our People's Churchwarden, and Ali Itani set up a community WhatsApp group, which has proved an invaluable means of communication. We were able to celebrate VE day on the village green with social distancing and clap every Thursday evening sending our thanks to the NHS.

Sadly Mr Keith Williams, a local farmer, passed away recently and it was good see his friends and neighbours from the village stand on the roadside close to the church to pay their respects.

David Banning-Lover



Priory Church of St Mary's Usk

Following the ceasing of church services in mid-March, St Mary's had been open day and night for private prayer for just one week when we received the directive that all churches must be locked. We left the North Porch gates open and the prayer tree remains there, on to which prayers have been hung, and lovely rainbow pictures posted on the door. Recently a flock of Doves of

Hope arrived in the church yard (thank you Carol!).

The first issue of the Keep in Touch newsletter was published on March 22nd, thanks to Debbie Harper who has done a fantastic job of editing this wonderful mix of prayers, reflections, local and diocesan news, for the past 12 weeks and still counting. It is circulated via e mail, with hard copies delivered by PCC members to those who have no computer. We have been pleased to share across the Ministry Area, too. Many thanks go to Debbie and to all who have contributed to the content, and circulated and delivered copies. It really has kept us all in touch. Modern technology in the form of WhatsApp, Skype and Zoom has been a boon too, not forgetting the good old fashioned landline telephone, so vital to those without smart phones or computers.

Sunday worship has continued throughout – some ‘Zooming’ into Kevin's Service from Raglan,, followed by Bishop Cherry's Service from Newport, others joining together, spiritually if not physically to tune into Radio 4 service at 8.10 am and services from

Bangor, St David's and Hereford Cathedral later in the morning . The choir have been attempting to keep their voices in good fettle, singing alone (or with their families and dogs!) in their homes, and hopefully other worshipers have been singing along to the broadcast hymns too!

Vulnerable residents of Usk have been very fortunate to receive the services of the Community help Group set up by Laura Jones- willing and selfless volunteers have shopped, delivered meals and offered any manner of support where needed. Take away and delivered meals have been available from pubs and the Grange. One Stop, the Co-op and Morris's Farm Shop have gone the extra mile to provide safe access and provision of essentials, and Russell from the Willows, now open for business, has delivered plants and other garden essential where needed throughout lockdown – and the good news is that Usk **is** in Bloom again this year, thanks to Russell and Anna from the Willows who have completed all the planting which would normally have been done by the Usk in Bloom volunteers, who will be able to maintain the beds and tubs while socially distancing. Members of Liz Baker's knitting group have individually been busy using donated wool to make covers and small items for sale in St David's Hospice Shop once it is able to open.

We are surely blessed and have so much to be thankful for.

Sarah Byford



A View from St Thomas à Becket, Wolvesnewton.

With many members of our congregation self-isolating [and rightly so], the communal life of the scattered Wolvesnewton parish has been decidedly limited. Obviously, for most of the elderly, the old-fashioned telephone has been the main source of contact. Occasionally there are short, sweet snatches of conversation across hedges, through car windows, over garden walls. The Llangwm Support group has been kindly helping us by delivering prescriptions and shopping to those who are shielded or vulnerable.

St Thomas à Becket has held precious few services over the last 12 months; just when we were settling into the regular H E services again, the builders having finished their work, we were plunged, with the entire country, into Lockdown. Like all churches, we have missed our Easter celebrations, Whitsun, Pentecost, Lent, Mothering Sunday, but also, we had our last Harvest service and supper in Autumn 2018; an important festival still in rural Wolvesnewton. It feels like a great gap in time for our parish church and a **long** while since 'normal'.

And here we still are.

But there is a glimmer of Light, possibly? Opening the churches for private prayer is probably the best thing suggested for months. At last our church buildings might do their job in this time of huge distress and spiritual need. Our beautiful, ancient church, after hundreds of years of prayer and Witness, is still and will remain a beacon of Hope in a sea of undulating grassland.

Bryony Jacques & Bob Greenland

A note from your editor:

Thank you all for sharing your lockdown experiences and thank you Graham for sharing with us such a valuable aid to prayer. It has been a difficult time for us all, and will continue to be so for many months to come, but with the tremendous community spirit, caring and love evident in the accounts you have given, the beacon of Hope to which Bob refers will surely continue to shine brightly throughout the Ministry Area and beyond, strengthening our faith and our will to pursue our Vision for the future.

Sarah Byford

10 Most Important Verses on Prayer in the Bible

• **Lori Hatcher** Author

- Prayer is both marvellous and mysterious. The idea of communicating with the Creator of the universe seems almost ludicrous, and certainly presumptuous, not to mention intimidating.
- Why would God want to talk with us? Is there a right and wrong way to pray? Why does God answer some prayers but not others? Does it matter that we only have a little faith?
- Thankfully, the [Bible](#) gives us insight into the how's and why's of prayer. Since God invites us to talk with him, it's no surprise he gives us guidelines. I've compiled a list of what I consider the ten most important verses on prayer:

Top 10 Prayer Bible Verses

1. [Luke 18:13-14](#): *“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

These verses, from the well-known story of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple, reveals the prayer that allows us to enter into a relationship with God: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The tax collector was honest with God about his sin. He humbled himself, repented, and acknowledged his need for God’s mercy. God answered his prayer and saved him.

Bottom line—the first step in developing a prayer life is calling upon God for salvation.

2. [Psalm 66:18](#): *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”*

This verse from David’s psalm shows us a major hindrance to God’s willingness to hear our prayers—unconfessed sin. Some might ask, “If sin prevents God from hearing our prayers, then none of us have a chance, because we all sin, even after we’re saved.”

A careful reading of [Psalm 66:18](#), however, draws our attention to the word “cherished.” “If I had *cherished* sin...” To cherish sin means to embrace it. To love it, hold on to it,

and refuse to give it up. This is vastly different from committing a sin that we regret, confess, and forsake as soon as the Holy Spirit brings it to our attention. God doesn't expect us to be sinless, but he **does** call us to deal with our sin as soon as possible ([1 John 1:9](#)).

Bottom line—we can't live a consistently sinful lifestyle and expect God to hear our prayers.

3. [Psalm 34:15](#): *"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry."*

If we have a right relationship with God and are earnestly seeking to follow and honour him with our lives, we never have to wonder if he's listening to our prayers. On the contrary, this verse assures us that he is carefully attuned to our lives and eager to hear every prayer that comes from our lips.

Bottom line—God hears the prayers of those who put their trust in him.

4. [Daniel 9:18](#): *"We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy."*

This beautiful excerpt from Daniel's prayer on behalf of the Jews exiled in Babylon shows us a profound truth about prayer—that God answers our prayers because of his mercy, not our good works. Many believers think their good works obligate or persuade God to act on their behalf. And while God does call us to live holy lives, it is not our obedience that moves God to answer our prayers, it is his great mercy toward us.

Bottom line—God's mercy, not our goodness, is the basis for answered prayers.

5. [Psalm 5:3](#): *"In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation."*

The psalmist who penned [Psalm 5:3](#) models the attitude we should have when we pray—that of eager expectation. We should believe God will answer our prayers and diligently watch for his hand at work. The psalmist also shows us that when we pray early in the day, we have the rest of the day to anticipate God's answer.

Bottom line—when we pray, we can wait in eager anticipation for God to work on our behalf.

6. [1 John 5:14](#): *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."*

God delights in answering prayers that align with his will. But how do we know what God's will is? The most reliable way to know is by reading his Word. As we seek God through Bible reading and prayer, we get to know his heart and gain wisdom and

spiritual insight. This gives us a greater understanding of how to pray according to his will, and a greater chance of having our prayers answered.

Bottom line—God answers every prayer that aligns with his will.

7. [James 4:3](#): *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*

This verse from the book of James tells us why God says “No” to many of our prayers—they are selfish, self-centred, and sometimes downright bad for us. Because God is wise and loving, like any good parent, he will not give things that will harm us or others.

Bottom line—God will say no to our prayers if we ask for something for the wrong reason or for the wrong purpose.

8. [Matthew 26:42](#): *“He (Jesus) went away a second time and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.’”*

Jesus set the supreme example of surrender and submission to the Father’s will when he prayed for God to spare him from dying on the cross. Because he was fully human, he was fearful and reluctant to experience the agony of the crucifixion. Because he was fully God, he could have refused to die, but instead, in humble trust and submission, he prayed, “may your will be done.”

On the surface, death by crucifixion seemed to end Christ’s ministry. In reality, his death on the cross paved the way for countless believers to receive eternal life by believing in his death and resurrection.

Bottom line—we can surrender our will to God’s in complete confidence that he knows what’s best.

9. [Mark 9:24](#): *“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*

This honest confession comes from a man whose son was demon-possessed. He wasn’t fully convinced Jesus had the power to deliver his son, but he asked anyway.

This passage debunks two of the greatest misconceptions about prayer—that if we have enough faith, God will answer our prayers, and if we don’t, he won’t. Scripture doesn’t support the idea that great faith produces great miracles and small faith prevents them. Instead, God tells us to ask in faith, believing that he can and will answer our prayers in the way he knows is best. Even frightened, tiny, mustard-seed faith like this father had can and does move the hand of God.

Bottom line—it’s not how much faith we have that matters, but who we have faith in.

10. **James 5:16**: *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

What a beautiful affirmation James, the half-brother of Jesus, gives in this short verse. When we wonder if prayer accomplishes anything, he encourages us—not only is prayer powerful, but it’s effective. “You’re not wasting your time,” he seems to call to us. “Keep praying! God is using your prayers to accomplish his will.”

Bottom line: The prayers of godly Christians work.

I don’t know why God uses the prayers of his people to accomplish his work in the world, but I’m glad he does. I’m humbled to think we can talk to him at any time of the day or night. I’m grateful that he’s never too busy to hear our prayers and act on our behalf.

My prayer for us all is that we will never take for granted the privilege and the power of prayer.

Lori Hatcher, Author

Shared by *Graham Opperman*