

# PARTNERS

## The Usk Ministry Area Newsletter

### AUTUMN 2020



Three months have passed since the summer edition of Partners, in which our seven parishes shared their experiences of lockdown and looked forward to the re-opening of our churches. Whilst we all yearn for a return to normal as we knew it, we now know that this is unlikely any time soon – however we are thankful that as a result of prayer, together with the commitment and hard work of the clergy, church wardens and other willing helpers, we are able to share our experiences of re-opening our churches for worship and other parish activities - so read on!



#### **Christchurch, Coed-y-paen**

We are delighted that the new Church roof is now finished along with a few other maintenance jobs. It looks wonderful thanks to the meticulous craftsmanship and expertise of Clayton Rowles and his son Jordan also helped by Matt

Hiscox. It looks a simple roof but at the angle of 45 degrees and the very hot weather when it was done it took a lot of stamina and hard work , we are grateful to them all .



I am personally extremely grateful to John Harris, Chairman of the Building Group for his amazing support throughout this project from beginning to end.

John has been wonderful, I certainly couldn't have done all this without his advice, guidance and incredible knowledge and expertise. A huge thank you to John for all his time and talents!!

We now must start serious fund raising to replace the funds used but we do it with the knowledge that Christchurch is restored and faces another chapter in its history in good structural order.

We have a very supportive community and hopefully they will help us do this. We are setting up “Friends of Christchurch” which will start off new fundraising ideas.

We are hoping if our Covid 19 risk assessment is acceptable to have our first Service in Christchurch on the 4th October, time to be confirmed.



*Cilla Davies*

## St Cybi's, Llangibby



The photo shows some of the congregation chatting after the first service post total lockdown, when only outdoor services were permitted. That Sunday, 9th August, coincided with the day that the Church in Wales's calendar of days honouring significant Welsh Christians celebrates the life of Augustine Baker.

He was one we could almost claim as our own, as he was born to a notable Catholic family in Abergavenny during the turbulent times of the Reformation, when changes of the monarch would mean you could find yourself on the wrong side of the religious divide and facing execution. He became a noted lawyer but after a near-death experience from which he believed God had saved him, he went to the Continent and became a Benedictine monk, helping many groups of monks and nuns to develop their life of prayer and writing important works on spirituality still in use today. We also felt an affinity with him as, while coming back to visit his parents, he found himself in London at a time of plague and sadly died of it.

Two further planned outdoor services were cancelled because of rain, but when permission came to unlock our churches for services held under strict Covid 19 regulations, we set about measuring out seats according to the rules and now have 10.30 services on Sundays for the congregation of St Cybi's and friends from



**St Madoc's, Llanbadoc** who are still waiting to complete the final restoration of the interior after the spring floods. Under the Archdeacon's strict application of the Welsh Government's distancing rules we find our 120 seater church can only accommodate 30 persons.

This has had sad implications for St Cybi's. During the lockdown one of our longest serving PCC members, Stan Meek, has sadly passed away and his funeral on October 2nd cannot even accommodate all the members of his family who would wish to be there. The church is deeply indebted to Stan for his 32 years of immaculate work as our Treasurer, his stints as Churchwarden and his contribution to lay-led services, prayers and readings. He is much missed and we offer our sincere condolences to his wife Roma and all his family.

We had hoped for an easing of regulations as we go into the winter but that now is extremely unlikely. Therefore St Cybi's will continue with a 10.30 service each Sunday until we reach Advent, the church's New Year and contemplate what lies ahead for us in the Christmas season and beyond, knowing, come what may, God will be with us all the way.

Pamela Love.

## St Andrew's Tredunnoch



**The Village Harvest Picnic** was held on Saturday September 5<sup>th</sup> in the grounds of St Andrew's Church. It was a beautiful day and many of the village residents were able to bring their picnics and set up their picnic mats, tables and chairs in a safe socially distance manner. The adults and children were entertained by Jason with his Samba drums! A great deal of noise and laughter was to be heard!

Everyone was asked to bring along a selection of packaged and tin foods to donate to the Raven House Trust in Newport. Over four green recycling boxes full of food were donated.

Father Graham Opperman attended and blessed the Harvest Loaf that was beautifully made for us by the bakers of Morris' Garden Centre. What a great afternoon we all had in the sunshine of Tredunnoch.

*David Banning-Lover & Rowena Brace*



## St. Peter, Paul & John, Llantrisant

We share the blessing of living in a rural environment, scarcely impacted by Corona Virus beyond some personal inconvenience, longer hair and not being able to hug wider family or friends.

However as a Church our local frailty has been exposed. Yes Llantrisant church is in good condition, both our churchyards are reasonably well maintained by friends and neighbours and we have been authorised to re-open for common worship.

However during lockdown our worshipping community seems to have dwindled further and our Christian witness has become remote. The joy of fellowship in a congregation of 4 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of August felt somewhat hollow when compared with the companionship of 10 non worshipping friends helping to deal with the large oak tree which fell in the churchyard that weekend. Lockdown has also impacted on the possible disposal of St Llwyll's church which still sits rather forlornly in its spiritual surroundings guarded by a high safety fence.

We believe however that the challenges posed by nature in its various forms are there to be overcome by hope and hard work. By the time this note is being read we will know if we have a new Ministry Leader and Incumbent to share with the other churches in our Area. There will be new energy and fresh opportunities as we seek new ways of making the Church relevant for the times ahead.

*Sandy Blair*



**St Thomas à Becket, Wolvesnewton** is emerging from more than a year of disruption. It began with the long awaited major restoration work on the tower. The original work was expanded to take in other repairs around the church. During much of that time the church was not in use and services were held elsewhere. We had hardly got back into the swing of regular services when lockdown took over.

We are now celebrating the return to our fortnightly Eucharist service with the first having been held on 27<sup>th</sup> September. The weather on that day was perfect and reflected our joy in being together albeit socially apart of course! In such a rural area, with poor mobile signals and several of our congregation not using the internet, keeping in touch has been difficult during lockdown. May this be the first step back into being a worshipping community once more.

Bob Greenland



**Priory Church of St Mary's Usk**

An outdoor service of Thanksgiving, Praise and Lament, led by Bill Savage, took place in the Garden of Remembrance on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, when a full complement of the 30 allowed enjoyed the long awaited opportunity to



meet (socially distanced!) for Communal worship. Many thanks to John Harris for his meticulous risk assessments and for making sure all the rules that keep us safe were adhered to (paces were not good enough for John, he had his tape measure out to ensure the chairs were 2 m. apart!) Everyone resisted the temptation to sing along to the recorded hymns (particularly hard for the choir members present!) It was lovely to enjoy music, and although we can't sing we are very happy that Pete can now play our wonderful organ for our 10.30 Eucharist services in St Mary's now held on two Sundays a month. As well as playing at the beginning and end of the service, and during the Eucharist, Pete plays the music for two hymns, for which we, the congregation, are supplied the words, and 'sing' in our heads, – and it works!



On alternate Sundays a Eucharist (Green Book) Service, is held at 8.am. The church continues to be open for private prayer each Thursday morning. This sequence of events ensures a minimum of 72 hours between church occupancy, which, together with the implementation all the other required safety measures with which we are all now only too familiar, maximises the safety of our worshipers and hopefully gives them the confidence to come back for more! Of course there are those more vulnerable church members who do not yet feel safe to return to the building for worship, and are happier to continue with various forms of virtual worship, and this we completely understand.

Unfortunately members of our Family Church have not been able to meet together yet. Instead, they can receive a monthly bag containing a story, prayers, craft activities and ideas for songs for the children. There is also a topic for the adults to consider. At present we cannot share food (and we really miss that cake!) but we can continue to pray for each other.

The choir continues with their twice monthly virtual practices via Zoom, when Judith works miracles with her various bits of technology, and puts us through our paces, allowing us to access and enjoy all the lovely anthems which we so long to sing once more in Church – but in the meantime our vocal chords are kept exercised, and various cats, dogs and husbands are treated to musical entertainment on alternate Mondays – and maybe sometimes join in!



*Carol Southwell & Sarah Byford*

## **Esther John (1960) Missionary and Martyr**

A statue to this modern martyr was unveiled in July 1998 and stands above the west entrance to Westminster Abbey. Esther John was born Qamar Zia, on 14th October 1929, one of seven children. As a child she attended a government school and, after the age of seventeen, a Christian school.

There she was profoundly moved by the transparent faith of one of her teachers, and she began to read the Bible earnestly.

It was when reading the 53rd chapter of Isaiah that she was suddenly overtaken by a sense of conversion to this new religion.

When India was partitioned Qamar Zia moved with her family into the new state of Pakistan. Here she made contact with a missionary, Marian Laugesen in Karachi. Laugesen, at her request, passed on to her, a copy of a New Testament.

Her Christian faith grew privately, even secretly. Then, seven years later, she ran away from home, fearful of the prospect of marriage to a Muslim husband.

She found her way back to Laugesen in Karachi. For a while Qamar Zia worked in an orphanage there, and it was at this time that she took the name Esther John. Her family still pressed her to return and to marry, but on 30th June 1955 she took a train north to Sahiwal, in the Punjab.

Here she lived and worked in a mission hospital, stayed with the first Anglican bishop of Karachi, Chandu Ray, and celebrated her first Christmas. Finding a vocation to teach, she entered the United Bible Training Centre in Gujranwala in September 1956. In April 1959 she completed her studies there and moved to Chichawatni, some thirty miles from Sahiwal, living with American Presbyterian missionaries.

She evangelized in the villages, travelling from one to the other by bicycle, teaching women to read and working with them in the cotton fields. At times her relationship with her distant and perplexed family appeared calm; at others anxiety and tension brewed.

Her death was sudden and mysterious. On 2nd February 1960 Esther John was found dead in her bed at the house where she lived at Chichawatni. She had been brutally murdered, apparently by a Muslim fanatic.

Her body was taken to the Christian cemetery at Sahiwal and buried. Later, a memorial chapel was built in front of the nurses' home in the grounds of the hospital there. Today, Esther John is remembered with devotion by the Christian community with whom she lived and worked.

Shared by *Graham Opperman*

## **And finally .....**

Thank you all for sharing your news and experiences during continued Covid 19 restrictions, and thank you Graham for sharing with us an insight into one of our lesser known saints.

Although it continues to be a difficult time for us all, by now you will all be aware that we have something very special and joyous to look forward to – in January 2021 we shall welcome Rev. Sally Ingle-Gillis as Leader of the Usk Ministry Area.

Those of you who have been able to access Sally's 'Just Five Minutes' reflections, to be found on the Wentwood Ministry area Facebook page, have already had the opportunity to experience and appreciate Sally's vibrant, out-going and caring nature, her deep faith, her excellent powers of communication and much more.

We can look forward with optimism to welcoming a leader who will listen, and understands rural communities; who will ensure that every church and every age group within our MA has an equal place at the table and who will unite us and encourage us to use the gifts which God has given us – it is up to us to respond accordingly.



*Sarah Byford*  
**Editor**



