

PARTNERS

The Usk Ministry Area Newsletter

Autumn 2021

Sally's Message

Dear Friends,

My weeks seem to lurch between fantastic conversations and opportunities with you all, to small but ceaseless mountains of administration! I know I should embrace both as part of my ministry with you but I must confess to preferring one to the other and I think the way I have described them both tells you which I favour!



I have realised that the way we talk about things, the language we use is incredibly important, as it affects the way we view things, even if we don't mean to or realise it.

In turn this has got me thinking about the language we use to talk about parts of church and I thought I would share some of my thinking with you. Are you ready?!

I wonder how many times I or perhaps you have started a conversation/email/announcement with "there are some jobs that need doing and we are looking for volunteers....." or something similar? Jobs and volunteers. Perfectly fine words, we know exactly what they mean. But are they the right words to use in the context of church? I don't mean to be controversial here, and I'm certainly not being critical of any of us, these are words I use often. But if we are to look towards the bible and think about what we are taught there, in the context of our church community and our wider lives, I'm just not sure these are the right words.

There is a wonderful introduction to this in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he says - *There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve the same Lord, and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.*

I love this description, it reminds us that **all** that we do, not just in our church lives, is as a result of God working in us. It is also a good opportunity for us to see that we have a set of gifts, and that the gifts of others may be very different, but no less important. Which brings me back to where I started. Jobs and volunteers. Or might we do well instead to speak about ministries and gifts. Whether we have a gift for hospitality, or one for pastoral care, whether we enjoy putting together newsletters or arranging flowers, we might even love to iron altar linen or lead small groups, the point is, these are ministries, each and every one of them, and we are using our God given gifts to exercise them and share them.

Thank you for the ministries that you all share with each other, and please don't tell me that you don't have a ministry! Praying is the biggest ministry that any of us have and I know that we all make efforts to pray. So thank you for your ministries, and for sharing your gifts so freely. My prayer for us all is that we continue to show each other, and the

wider community the love of God, in all that we do, confident that as Christians our gifts come from him, and we are to share them as freely as we are able.

With my love,

Sally xxx

News and Views from the Parishes

Christchurch, Coed-y-paen



Christchurch celebrated the completion of its new roof with a special Service of dedication taken by Bishop Cherry on the 25th of July. Due to Covid regulations the Service was held outside in the Churchyard. I was overwhelmed by the wonderful community support in getting ready for the Bishop's special visit to our little Church. People came with gazebos, sound equipment, music stands etc. Our wonderful Churchyard volunteers worked hard

ensuring the Churchyard was immaculate. One of our village members who has a decorating business painted the Church door, porch and gates free of charge to mark the occasion.....amazing kindness !!

A good crowd attended enjoying the sunshine and beautiful singing provided by some of the Cathedral choir which was a real treat!

Our grateful thanks to Bishop Cherry for a very special and memorable occasion which will be treasured by us all.

Neil and Nelson at the " Carpenters Arms " put on a super Sunday lunch for everyone to enjoy after the Service accompanied by some



lovely Welsh music played by a local harpist .

We celebrated Harvest last week which was one of the first Services inside Christchurch with the new Covid regulations .It was good to see the Church almost full of people and being able to sing ,even with masks on , our favourite Harvest hymns .



We all enjoyed Harvest Supper once again in the "Carpenters " where our auction of Harvest gifts raised £277 for a charity known to Olwen in Zimbabwe, providing food and education to young people in a township in Harare.

As always a lot of work goes into the running of Christchurch and my sincere thanks to everyone who helps in so many ways.

Cilla Davies





St Madoc's, Llanbadoc

TO AUTUMN 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness'

The change of seasons reminds us all of the passage of time and the small adaptations that we make throughout each year. Autumn is a favourite-golden light, harvest, red berries and rosy fruit, the odd mist and a drop in temperature. Over the last year we have all had to accept different ways of living our lives to keep safe. The Heart of Monmouthshire Ministry Area has now become a reality and at St Madoc's (as in the case of all the many churches across the ministry area) we are welcoming new visitors to our congregation from all the country churches. We love meeting new people from across the ministry area and we will do our best to lend our support to other MA congregations too.

A successful harvest festival was held at St Madoc's 26th September 2021 and the majority of the produce was donated to the Roman Catholic Church meals service. We were delighted to be able to hold a wedding at the end of August, as this was the first one since the reopening of the church. It is a good excuse to give the church building a bit of a sparkle. St Madoc's now has the prospect of two more weddings-one in December and also May next year. It seems a lifetime since the flood that paralysed the building back in February 2020 and it is lovely to witness the old church slowly being able to serve the community once again.

Since the closure of the Red Shed Sales the sales team has been working hard to make sure the Red Shed is in the best possible condition. Efforts have been rewarded and we are proud to announce that there is a 'one off' stock clearance sale Tuesday 2nd November 2021. ***This is a stock clearance and no further goods for sale are required. Please do not leave any goods at the Red Shed.***

Hilary Morgan



St Tegfedd, Llandegfedd

There was a distinctly un-Harvest-like feel to the weather on 10 October, as Llandegfedd Church basked in a gorgeous Indian summer day.

A full church, lusty singing, tea and bara brith (and something a little stronger for those that wanted it), and of course Sally's splendid harvest shoes, all made for a

wonderful celebration of the harvest home."

Robert Aitken





St John the Baptist, Llanhennock

Welcome to the latest news from the top of the Llanhennock ridge.

We have not had an official connection with the other churches in the Usk Ministry Area for about 20 years, when we were in a triumvirate with Tredunnoc and Llantrisant. Most of our current congregation remember those days, which says something about our age!! We have now returned from whence we came, and to many of us it feels like “coming home”.

We would like to thank Revd Sally and other members of the Ministry Area who have welcomed us back with such friendliness.

We are extremely lucky to have Canon Arthur Edwards continuing to officiate at our twice monthly Sung Eucharist services at 10am. With Ann Clarke, our wonderful organist, making sure that the hymns selected are joyous and well known.

We have made many friends within Caerleon who have supported our fund raising events, such as Bingo, Quiz & Curry and Christmas Socials, which we hope to restart when we are allowed – we look forward to extending a welcome to our new friends in the Usk MA as well as welcoming our old friends back again. We are hoping to hold a Bingo evening, in the New Year, and the regular Christmas Social in December.

You are very welcome to join our services held at 10am on the first and third Sundays in the month – simply ring Gerry on 07881 786919 or 01633 450605 to ensure that there is available space.

Gerry Hawkins



St. Cybi's, Llangybi

At long last we seem to be moving cautiously towards a more normal way of operating in our churches.

Last Sunday morning we celebrated our Harvest Festival. This is always a heartening event. What happens the day before is that people take in their decorative contributions and place them around the church; and by the next morning the church is gloriously transformed! This year, for the second time, we were able to celebrate the beautiful gift of healthy babies welcomed into the church family in their Christenings. Wonderful!

It was indeed a great delight to reprise our initiative of 2 years ago in combining Harvest Festival with the baptism of a child from one of the village's long-standing farming families. Henry Matthew Arthur was the 17th Arthur to be entered into our current baptism book which came into use in 1877. His sweet 2 year-old sister Pip delighted everyone by asperging the whole congregation with the water from the font at the close of proceedings.

Byrdsong, who many will know for their beautiful singing in the local churches, practise every two weeks in St Cybi's on a Saturday morning. It is joyful to have the church walls ringing to the sound of their music as it must have done for centuries. Thank you, Byrdsong!

This Saturday afternoon St Cybi's bells will be heard ringing out for a branch practise. After almost two years without practises it will be with some trepidation that some of the ringers first take hold of a rope! The bells are greased and ready. . . but are the ringers?

So although we still need to be careful and treat Covid 19 with caution with our "Hands, Face, Space" routine, our lives are opening out again, and I think that is cause for celebration!

Sue Hiscox & Pam Love



St. Peter, Paul & John, Llantrisant & Llanllowell

The summer months have seen quite a roller coaster of events in our parish.

We had a wonderful outdoor Service of Evening Prayer, led by Bishop Cherry, at the end of June. The next morning a large branch dropped from high up one of our magnificent Lime trees, bringing lower boughs with it:

they fell almost where part of the congregation had been sitting the previous afternoon. Thanks be to God for the timing. Our risk assessment had not provided for such an incident!

After four years without such celebrations, this summer we had two weddings. The first in early August, the day the then lockdown was eased, was lovely but low key. Just the bridal party and 20 guests all seated with social distancing.

The second could not have been more different and needed an event specific risk assessment. The bride again was lovely, but the congregation of over 100 filled the church both physically and with boisterous singing. To mitigate the risks that might arise from the absence of social distancing, the bride and groom gave every guest a mask and a mini hand sanitiser. A new trend in goody bags, perhaps!??

Our core congregation remains very small, but our fortnightly services are often boosted by friends from other parishes. This was particularly so in mid-October when the congregation for our Harvest Themed service was 19 and we raised over £160 for the Usk Food Kitchen.

As autumn moves onwards towards winter, we will be hosting our Annual Act of Remembrance and preparing for our Carol service, both events strongly supported by the local community. We will also be seeking both a faculty and grant funding for the next stage of building repairs, whilst hoping that at long last, there may be some progress on the possible sale of St Llwyll's Church.

As for next year: we await news with keen anticipation mixed with some apprehension.

Sandy Blair



St Andrew's, Tredunnock

Illness amongst key workers has hindered progress but there is hope for a turnaround as there have been some lovely services, with young people attending. We are praying for growth.

Graham Opperman



Priory Church of St Mary's Usk

St Mary's has for some weeks now been able to open daily 10 am- 4.00 p.m., and not many days pass when the track and trace form and or the visitor's book indicate that the building has been visited and appreciated, both by locals and visitors to the town.

Sunday Services have continued as alternate Sundays 8.00 and 10.30 Eucharist, and from now on Morning prayer(Matins) will be celebrated at 10.30 on the second Sunday in the month (in addition to the 8.00 am Eucharist held on that day) The first of these services, led by Bill, was held on 10th October, at which the Choir, directed and inspired by Judith, was able to sing in church for the first time since March 2020 celebrating with the truly uplifting anthem "Shout For Joy." This format of service as an alternative to Eucharist was enjoyed by all.

Every Thursday the lovely service for Healing and Wholeness at 11 a.m. continues to provide just that for those who attend and those they pray for.

Other services have include two baptisms, sadly several funerals, and the long awaited Celebration of the Life of our dear friend and lifelong supporter of St Mary's, Ethel Miles.



In late September on the eve of the All Wales Ploughing and Hedging match which took place at Llancayo the following day, over eighty people from all over Wales and beyond gathered for a service, during which Sally blessed the Plough.

A week later saw us celebrating Harvest which was combined with Climate Sunday. The church was decorated with flowers and fruits of the harvest, the Choir, Ladies Group and PCC each taking responsibility for a window, while the children's corner cleverly decorated by Caroline and Carol depicted both climate and harvest, the children's altar providing a venue for receipt of non-perishable food items to be donated to Raven House. Harvest hymns were sung with gusto by the congregation from behind their masks and Sally more than rose to the challenge of delivering an inspirational sermon which addressed both harvest and the challenges of climate change.



The service was followed by a Harvest Lunch in the Centenary Hall, enjoyed by forty members and friends of St Marys, who feasted on delicious cold meats, salad and harvest loaf, followed by homemade trifle and apple pie. It was truly wonderful to be together once more for a social occasion, and everything was organised by Dee and her helpers to be as Covid safe as humanly possible.

On the following Friday 230 children from Usk School came to St Mary's for their harvest service – oh how wonderful it was to hear them singing their harvest songs, reading beautifully, praying the prayers they had written themselves, and participating in Sally's interactive talk. Community worship at its best.

Sarah Byford & Carol Southwell

Family Church

We were delighted to meet each other once again in church. Our previous time together had been a picnic in St Mary's Garden of Remembrance on a beautifully sunny day in July and, before that, in February 2020.

We gave thanks to God for all that He has given us; we heard a Bible story, prayed, sang and played percussion instruments and the children completed a variety of craft activities. This was followed by a snack meal whilst the adults enjoyed a cup of tea and cake (thanks to Sue Cowburn). We also collected entries to our Christmas card competition, to be judged by Rev Sally this week.

Families were encouraged to look at 'Pumpkin Heroes' as a Christian alternative for celebrating Hallowe'en.

We meet in St Mary's church at 4pm on the first Sunday of the month- our future dates this year: 7th November and 5th December. We welcome all families to come and join us.

Carol Southwell



St Thomas à Becket, Wolvesnewton

St. Thomas à Becket is awaking from the lockdown. As we plunged into it last year we had completed the major structural works to our tower but some of the other ancillary work had still to be completed. Now we are getting back into gear we have moved a step further to our aim of welcoming the many walkers

who pass our way into our haven of peace and contemplation in the presence of God. Our new vigour might also have something to do with the fact that at the end of the month we look forward to greeting visitors to our Ministry Area Service on 31st. October. By then we hope to have also commissioned our long awaited composting loo which will bring relief to many after waiting so long.



Scilla Greenland

A note from the editor

Thanks to all of you who have contributed your news and views for us all to enjoy; thank you Stephen for sharing with us all your reflection (below).

The next and final Usk Ministry Newsletter, will be the Christmas edition, copy for which I would like to receive **no later than Friday 17th December please.**

It does not have to be news if you haven't any of note – photos, short articles, poems, prayers, anything which we can all enjoy and which brings us fellowship as we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, and move together into what promises to be an exciting and challenging 2022

Sarah Byford

A Reflection on the Ministry of Reconciliation.

This is an amended version of a reflection given by Canon Dr Stephen James at the healing service in St Mary's Usk on 9th September 2021.

The dictionary definition of reconciliation is, to settle a quarrel or difference, or to re-establish friendly relations between two or more people.

In the context of the church, we can take this further, as for Christians, reconciliation is also the restoration, or the healing, of broken relationships between humanity and God.

So, it is an important, yet sometimes neglected, part of the church's ministry of healing.

When thinking about reconciliation the word that most frequently comes into my mind is forgiveness.

The Bible has many passages to do with forgiveness.

In Matthew chapter 18 we can read - *Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times".*

And in Chapter 4 of his letter to the people in Ephesus, St Paul writes - *Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

So, forgiveness is both a recognition of our own failings and then asking God to forgive us and being prepared to forgive others.

This is something Henri Nouwen wrote about in his book *Bread for the Journey*, where we can read, *There are two sides of forgiveness: giving and receiving. Although at first sight, giving seems to be harder, it often appears that we are not able to offer forgiveness to others because we have not been able fully to receive it. Only as people who have accepted forgiveness can we find the inner freedom to give it.... Only when we can receive forgiveness can we give it.*

He went on to write - *To forgive another person from the heart is an act of liberation. We set that person free from the negative bonds that exist between us.... But there is more. We also free ourselves from the burden of being the offended one.... Forgiveness, therefore, liberates not only the other but ourselves.*

In a recent BBC Songs of Praise broadcast the Chaplain at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation in London also spoke about this when he said - *"Forgiveness is first and foremost something we do for ourselves, otherwise we walk around life carry burdens of guilt and a need for revenge".*

Now for me true Christian forgiveness needs to be rooted in love. That is showing the same love for God and for one another (including those with whom we may have fallen out or disagree) as God shows for each of us.

Again, there are numerous passages of scripture to do with Love.

In Chapter 6 of the Deuteronomy, we can read - *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.*

In Chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, *'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven'.*

And in his First Letter, St John writes - *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know*

God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

And for me, it is this atoning sacrifice of Christ that Godfrey Birthill is writing about in a reflection in the Northumbria Community's Celtic Daily Prayer Book 2.

*When I look at the blood, all I see is love, love, love.
When I stop at the cross, I can see the love of God.
But I can't see competition, I can't see hierarchy.
I can't see pride or prejudice, or the abuse of authority.
I can't see lust for power. I can't see manipulation.
I can't see rage or anger, or selfish ambition.
I can't see unforgiveness. I can't see hate or envy.
I can't see stupid fighting, or bitterness, or jealousy.
I can't see empire building. I can't see self-importance.
I can't see back-stabbing, or vanity, or arrogance.*

*I see surrender, sacrifice, salvation, humility, righteousness, faithfulness, grace, forgiveness, love!
Love... love...*

When I stop... at the cross, I can see the love of God.

As Christians all we do should be rooted in prayer and as part of its ministry of reconciliation, each day in Coventry Cathedral the following Litany of Reconciliation is said.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

*The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,
Father, forgive.*

*The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,
Father, forgive.*

*The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,
Father, forgive.*

*Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,
Father, forgive.*

*Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,
Father, forgive.*

*The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children,
Father, forgive.*

*The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,
Father, forgive.*

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Stephen James