



South East Wales Unitarian News

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April 2010

FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday, 2nd May – District AGM at Highland Place, Aberdare. Service at 11am conducted by District President Sarah Boyce; Shared lunch at 12 noon; AGM at 1pm; Talk at 2pm by Neil Sumner of the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust.

DISTRICT CYMANFA GANU

The annual Cymanfa Ganu was held at Swansea Unitarian Church at 11am on Sunday 21st March. There was a good attendance and we were particularly pleased to welcome a group of friends from Ceredigion. The weather was extremely kind to us and everyone seemed to have a spring in their step –whether this was as a result of the sun's rays or the distant sound of dance music from a Dancing Class held in another part of the building, is a matter of conjecture.

Julianne Morgan welcomed us on behalf of the Swansea congregation and introduced our conductor Rev J Eric Jones. A short period of devotion led by Julianne included a reading from the Bhagavad Gita by father and daughter, Anoop and Tanya Bhanaut.

Skilful guidance by conductor Eric Jones and the expertise of our organist Stephen Wilson soon had us producing some fine singing. The programme of English and Welsh hymns was interspersed with some excellent musical items from soloist Catrin Lewis, Rebekah Thomas (cornet), Elizabeth Rosenberg (flute) and Isabelle Rosenberg (clarinet).

In her short address District President Sarah Boyce spoke of the universal appeal of music; of its presence 'everywhere'; and of its ability to reduce stress. Sarah's daughter Caroline then read the hymn How Can I Keep From Singing!

Following an expression of thanks by Sarah to the conductor and organist, and to the Swansea congregation for hosting the successful event, we enjoyed a welcome, and well-earned, shared lunch.

HEN DŶ CWRDD, TRECYNON

Most of our readers will be aware that the chapel building at Trecynon was handed over to the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust around 3 years ago. The Trust has taken over half a dozen Welsh Chapels for restoration and they include Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon and the old Unitarian Chapel at Llwynrhydowen in Ceredigion.

In January of this year, the chapel at Trecynon was surrounded with scaffolding and, by now, a new roof has been put in place and builders are in the process of renewing windows and entrance door. Later in the year, they are hoping to restore the chapel internally and, afterwards, discuss possible uses for the building.

The District Annual Meeting at Highland Place on May 2nd will include a talk by Mr Neil Sumner, the Trust's architect, and he hopes to start forming a "Friends of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd" group to discuss possible uses.

The chapel should be marking its 260 years of existence in 2011 – having been established in 1751.

Rev J Eric Jones

GETTING TO KNOW YOU ...Informal interviews with local Unitarians

The interview in this issue is with Philip Griffiths a member of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd Chapel, Cefn Coed and Secretary to the South East Wales District Association, a position which he has occupied for some time.

A person local to the Merthyr area, Philip has his roots in the building trade. Married to Margaret, a talented musician and singer who often stands in as organist at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, with three, now grown-up, children (two sons and a daughter) and grandchildren.

Philip was initially articled to the former Breconshire County Council before training at the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff. Philip has his own Architectural practice, which makes considerable demands on his time, energy and health.

Ella Lewis-Jones

What is your earliest Memory?

Strangely it is Unitarian based, but at what age I am unsure, I was ill, probably my first attack of 'man flu', I awoke from a delirious sleep on the settee in the kitchen in front of a roaring fire to see the Rev. Marles Thomas sitting on the end of the settee. And after he went I remember asking my mother who he was.

What is your strongest memory of your school or university days?

School: certainly not putting in enough effort, I clowned my way through, far more interested in the Scouts and having a good time. I had a tendency to switch off in those subjects that did not come easily. Being unexpectedly made head boy was obviously a surprise but a big confidence boost and the start of the squaring up process. Regret not taking Welsh.

University: after cobbling together enough A levels to gain a place at Aberystwyth to do geography and geology (both subjects remain a huge interest), I declined the place - which greatly upset my dad, but I was aware that building and architecture were the way forward.

It was perhaps fate, that within days, I read of a position as an articled architect with the Breconshire County Council which I was fortunate to obtain. I had a career-forming 18 months in Brecon before entering the Welsh School of Architecture where I worked hard really fulfilling my potential. I obtained a first but regret not returning to do the research degree offered, but after six years I had had enough. Because of my head start at Brecon and my family building industry background I assisted a lot of students all through college, and regret not returning to academia as a tutor, following the advice given to me by many people since.

Are you happy?

I have always made the best of what I have. My favourite advice to myself and others is that you can only play with the cards you have been dealt. Sometimes though, the cards are so bad you have to fold and start again.

Which living person do you most admire?

No one springs to mind as not many people reach the standards and expectations I set but fail to reach myself but I still expect from others, most of us are flawed and we all fall short. But Barack Obama is having a good go.

What is your most treasured possession?

Not being a materialistic person there is no treasured possession. My treasure is my wife - certainly not a possession but certainly my Anam Cara or soul mate. We are completely unsuited and opposites in most things, but we seem to happily rub along.

Obviously my children, though I was not a good father. I hope to be a better grandfather by putting in the time. I think the world of 'my' horse Max, dog Turk and cat Tigga - all left to me to feed, clean and exercise by the children when they left home. The animals and I are getting older and we cannot jump five bar gates anymore.

If you could bring something from the distant past into your life, what would you choose?

I can think of nothing to bring forward from the past, we are all lucky to live in the computer age of scientific knowledge and medicines. I would however like to travel back in time to Egypt and see how they did build the pyramids because I think the experts have it wrong.

Also from the immediate past I would like to see the return of the old district based General Assembly, tweak it management-wise and save us all this re-invention of the Unitarian wheel. No management system is that bad that it needs destroying and re-designing. That should start a letter column in the District News.

What do you owe your parents?

All that I am. The work ethic from my dad, which has thankfully passed to my children, although he was a worse 'time-input' father than me. But his epitaph, 'One of nature's gentlemen', put there at the behest of others, truly sums him up. The humanitarian ethic from my mother, whose table and chattels were willingly shared with those less well off than her. Again her epitaph of a 'truly caring person' sums up her life. A book bought for me one Christmas by my father, titled Man Must Measure has seemingly been the basis of my career as I have been measuring buildings and people all my life.

I was fortunate in having a second father and mother in my mum's brother - my Uncle Dave, and his wife Annie, and no retrospective look at my life would be complete without a mention of two very dear and influential people.

What or who is the greatest love of your life?

Obviously my wife Margaret, a superlative wife, mother and grandmother who has been, and still is, the overarching pillar of the family. Excuse the modern American idiom.

Who would you invite to a dream dinner party?

Billy Connolly the finest story teller I have ever heard and Tony Blair the finest 'story' teller I have ever heard. Billy and I share a huge dislike of 'Tone' and would bend his ear with a few home truths, but I doubt if the meal would get past the soup course before Blair would have to take his leave.

What has been your biggest disappointment?

Not seeing my eldest son farming, and being able to work in his life passion and also carry on the family farming tradition inherited from his mother's side.

How do you relax?

Apart from reading the papers, a few soaps after dinner and a weekly dose of NICS it's not a word that has figured prominently in our lives, it has always been work and sleep for Margaret and I, but we are trying to carve a semi-retirement after 40 years of marriage and graft.

I do, however, love horses and horse racing and would watch it on television or attend far more meetings if time and money permitted. We are planning a big Alaska cruise this summer which is something we have always wanted to do.

What gives you the greatest satisfaction in your life?

Personally watching my grandchildren grow up, but professionally the big buzz is still doing a job well. I hate sloppy workmanship and half baked work of any sort, and am very hard on myself when I make mistakes. Also my Achilles heel, as I do not like starting things unless I can give them the best shot.

What single thing would improve your life?

It would obviously have to be my stammer, but, in all honesty, I have not done a lot about it. Would I be the person I am today without it? Would I have been richer or more famous? Could I have achieved more and got in amongst those politicians and made the world a better place to live in, without a stammer, or would I have become yet another incompetent politician?

How would you like to be remembered?

Never ever thought about it until now – 'An honest professional architect and a guy who tried to make society a better place'. Hope that's not a too pretentious answer.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

This one is easy – In all we do there is a fine dividing line between success and failure, and we all have to make that extra effort to keep up above the line.

We are not working hard enough in South East Wales to keep Unitarianism above the failure line.

CONGREGATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE POST OF WELSH DEPARTMENT GENERAL SECRETARY

I am sure that by now most Welsh Unitarians will know that in April 2011 the Rev J Eric Jones will retire after nearly 46 years as Secretary of the Welsh Department. This job has been undertaken voluntarily with only a small honorarium being paid to Eric. On his retirement, this honorarium will cease to exist and so, for the past eighteen months, the Denominational Support Commission (DSC) has been working with members of the Welsh Department towards the employment of the Secretary's successor.

Eric has been an exemplary Secretary, working hard to ensure the profile of the Welsh Department has remained high on the national agenda as well as representing us on prestigious Welsh Bodies and maintaining our presence at Welsh national events. The job has changed considerably during the inception of the Department in terms of the expectations of the General Assembly and the Denomination, as well as the legal obligations involved. It is for these reasons the DSC and Welsh Department feel they can no longer expect the full remit of work involved to be carried out voluntarily. Therefore, following Eric's retirement it is proposed to employ a half-time secretary at a salary of £15,000 per annum. The Job Description is challenging but if the profile of the Department is to be maintained it is necessary if Welsh Unitarianism is to flourish in the future.

The Executive Committee has agreed that this project can be one of a few to be *considered* for part funding from the GA during a time of considerable financial restraint. This means that Welsh Unitarians must find one third of the proposed salary which could then be matched by the Bowland Trust and the

other third provided by the General Assembly. I have said that the Welsh Department Secretary Job is *one* of several projects to be considered for funding and so it is only if we in Wales can guarantee to provide our portion of the funding that the GA will consider it. Therefore, the support of the members of all our twenty one chapels in Wales is key. The amount needed to be raised by individual chapels is not high, figures are available from all chapel Secretaries but all congregations have been asked, as a matter of urgency, to discuss this issue and report back as soon as possible to Rev Eric Jones.

Whilst thinking about this, it may be helpful to remember how and why the Welsh Department came into existence in the first place.

In 1964, the Rev Jacob Davies and other eminent Welsh Unitarians of the time realized the need to strengthen the links between the Welsh speaking churches and the General Assembly. A Welsh Department Committee was proposed to assist in dealing with the specific needs of most loyal Unitarians in Wales. These largely involved language, remoteness from London and cultural differences and although South East Wales was predominately English speaking at the time, both District Associations shared natural alliances formed over centuries. It was decided that in no way should the two be treated separately, especially as at least four congregations were members of both associations. Some of the early work of the Department focused on the translation of Sunday School materials and similarly translation of leaflets and the commission and publication of many periodicals and books was undertaken. This work has continued to be part of the wide remit of responsibility.

The General Assembly's first visit to Wales (Swansea) in 1965 coincided with the inauguration of the Welsh Department Committee – Cyfadran Gymru o'r Gymdeithas Undodiaid. The first meeting of the committee was held in the Swansea church on January 9th 1965. Of the original committee members, two are still active members of this District; Mrs Margaret Evans (Cardiff) and the Rev J Eric Jones (Aberdare and Cribyn) who became Secretary at that meeting. I think it is more than coincidence that in the year of his retirement, the General Assembly will once more hold its Annual Meetings in Swansea.

At the GA Annual Meetings in Nottingham this year, those attending will be asked to consider and rank in order of preference, the list of projects requiring funding. In effect, a shopping list will be discussed. Following the meetings, all churches and chapels will be asked to comment on their choices and from the results of this wide consultation, the Executive Committee will decide *which of the projects will be given priority*.

So, we in Wales have a choice, because if we cannot guarantee part of the funding for a Welsh Department General Secretary we will lose a vital opportunity to keep ourselves high on the General Assembly agenda. We must seriously ask ourselves, 'are we content to allow the work of the Welsh Department to disappear and with it, all that has been achieved since 1965?' or 'do we want to continue to play a valuable part in the traditions of British Unitarianism, sharing with other like minded people those things that really matter?'

If we believe in the latter, then we all have a responsibility to commit fully to the appointment of a successor to Eric and continue to uphold the dream and dedication of those who have gone before.

Lis Dyson-Jones
(Member of the EC, DSC and Welsh Department)

KEY MESSAGES FROM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Meeting in Manchester on 4/5 March 2010.

- The Executive Committee would encourage congregations to support the GA Weekend which will be held on 26-27 June. This is an opportunity to promote the movement and raise funds for the General Assembly. Look out for further information.
- Rev Lynne Readett was accorded full status on the General Assembly Roll of Ministers following completion of her probationary period.
- The Executive Committee welcomed the decisions of the Interview Panel to accept Chris (Cody) Coyne and Yvonne Aburrow for training for full ministry status, each to undergo three years training, and Sheena Gabriel, who is currently undertaking lay leader training, to undertake Lay Pastor training, to start immediately.
- The Executive Committee welcomed the successful collaborative work with the Quakers and Liberal Judaism on the issue of civil partnerships being registered in religious settings, which has been well reported in the media. This should hopefully lead to changes in the law in England and Wales. There is to be a meeting in Scotland involving Unitarians on the same issue.

- In approving the Nightingale Centre Annual Accounts, the Centre's Management Committee, Manager and Staff were commended for their hard work in controlling their costs and developing new business which has resulted in a surplus.
- The Executive Committee has begun the work of identifying an Electoral Panel to oversee the election of four new EC members in the Autumn of 2010 to take up office in April 2011.
- The Rev Martin Whitell has been co-opted onto the Executive Committee to replace Rev Dr Ann Peart who will be stepping down to act as GA Vice-President next year.
- A presentation on "Challenging Choices" will take place at the Annual Meetings in April with the intention that there will be wide ranging discussion on strategic priorities for the denomination and the funding of new initiatives. This will begin a process of debate and discussion. Consultation Packs will be circulated to congregations, districts and societies shortly after the Annual Meetings. The Executive Committee will make decisions on priorities and the annual budget for 2010/11 at its meeting in September 2010.
- The Chief Officer reported that the Director of Ministry post had gone out to advert and that he was working to clarify the communications needs of the General Assembly before moving to recruitment of the proposed Communications/IT post.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE COVENANT

The following Covenant was agreed by the Executive Committee on 5 March 2010

Purpose: To provide strategic leadership and trusteeship governance for the General Assembly.

In order to work together effectively in meetings of the EC, we strive to:

- Have our meeting interactions characterised by trust, respect, attentive listening, openness and honesty, unencumbered by prejudice and preconception.
- When in disagreement, respect minority opinions, and assume that each participant is motivated by good intent.
- Do our best to participate fully, and remain focused on the matter at hand.
- Be open to the potential of new and better ideas arising from group process.
- Balance the importance of agreement with the necessity of timely decisions and action.

In all of our interactions and working, both in and outside of meetings, we strive to:

- Follow through responsibly on our commitments
- Address conflict directly
- When speaking of EC decisions or other matters publicly, do so with respect for the people and the process by which decisions were made and do not attribute particular views to individuals
- Share all information relevant to EC decisions as openly as possible among the EC members
- Maintain a sense of the urgency and consequence of our work
- Acknowledge and manage conflicts of interest whether arising from conflicting roles or from potential personal gain
- Include the texture of the discussion and range of views in the reports of our meetings
- Specify which matters under discussion are to be held in confidence
- Support the implementation of EC decisions through our actions and words

In order to exert strong and effective leadership, we strive to:

- Maintain our focus on long term growth and sustainability, whilst ensuring that short-term needs receive appropriate attention
- Seek and utilize the best expertise available
- Be prepared to make unpopular decisions in the best interest of our movement
- Remain aware and respectful of the cultural differences throughout our movement and the importance of the goodwill and enthusiasm of volunteers

Jim Corrigan

UNITARIAN CO-ORDINATED COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

UCCN Conference, Great Hucklow, February 2010 — 'Getting Your Congregation Noticed'

I cannot quite recall my initial expectations of the above conference except to say that if I had thought that it would be a weekend break, it did not take long to dispel my illusions.

Lis and I arrived on Friday, just in time for lunch. At 2pm we embarked on what was the most challenging learning experience of the weekend, the video workshop. There were around 14 participants, two facilitators and a dog, all working away at different video presentations. This was quite a lengthy process and consisted of, recording a voice over of the script which we had prepared in advance, learning how to use PowerPoint, arranging the photographs we had taken with us in an appropriate order to match the script and most demanding of all, working out the individual timings of the photographs to work effectively with the voice over. It took a long time, there was much frustration but I think it would be absolutely true to say that everyone who attended that workshop came away having learned a great deal.



I thought the letter said, "Bring your own lap-dog."

Photo: James Barry



Ella and Lis (near left)

Photo: James Barry

Throughout the weekend there were opportunities to take part in quite a number of different activities. For example, on the Saturday afternoon we joined together in the lovely old chapel at Great Hucklow to record, what turned out to be, a couple of short services for the National Unitarian Fellowship. Part of the service we were present at is already posted on the NUF Web Site, if anyone is interested to have a look. However, I have to warn you, the singing is not quite up to Welsh standards.

There were also lots of chances to learn from other people's experiences of improving the profile of their congregation. This included examples of leaflets and newsletter from all over the country. Much of the literature which was on display was of a very high

standard and demonstrated considerable artistic and technological expertise as well as significant time commitment.

On both Friday and Saturday evenings the session was concluded with an Epilogue. On Saturday, it was our turn to jointly present the Epilogue. Lis had prepared a short reading which featured the spring equinox. The lights were dimmed and scented candles were lit by many of those present and the atmosphere became quiet and still. A perfect way to end the evening, many people remarked.

Looking back on the weekend, with the benefit of a few weeks space, although it was demanding, my experience has been that the more you put into something the more you gain from it. It was a lovely weekend, in beautiful surroundings with good wholesome food and stimulating congenial company. Next year at the UCCN Conference there will be workshops on Desk Top Publishing and Webcams. Nobody can accuse Unitarians of not keeping pace with technology.

Ella Lewis-Jones

My sincere thanks to the Aberdare congregation who supported my attendance at the UCCN Conference.

A word from Lis...

I fully endorse all that Ella has written, I would only add my delight at being able to be part of such a stimulating weekend among such pro-active Unitarians (despite the pre-course preparation and heavy snow which was falling as we left!). I like to think that what we contributed and learnt will be of help to our respective congregations and the District. My grateful thanks must also go to Keith Lewis-Jones for his help in 'polishing' my PowerPoint effort and to the Cardiff Church Committee for supporting my attendance.

Lis Dyson-Jones



The scene as we left for home

Photo: Ella Lewis-Jones

THOUGHT FOR NOW

(We are indebted to Anne Jones for bringing the following to our attention.)

Dance like nobody's watching;
Love like you can't be hurt;
Sing like nobody's listening;
Live like it's heaven on earth.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

How the time slips by, I look forward to having been President for the year and for another year as President at the AGM coming up soon, to be held at Aberdare on Sunday 2nd May when we are due to share a service, lunch, AGM and talk from Neil Sumner. This will be on the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust and the restoration of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon.

Aberdare, Cefncoed and Cardiff congregations shared a service at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefncoed on 7th March 2010 and this was truly a collaborative event from Cefncoed, with a good many chapel members delivering readings on a Spring and spring-cleaning theme. Morgan Chambers gave us the Rhythm of Life with gusto and Ken Morgan had admirably organised the order of service for this enjoyable service. We all enjoyed the excellent tea provided by the Cefncoed congregation which is an example of fellowship at its best.

The Cymanfa Ganu held on 21st March 2010 at Swansea church was an opportunity to discover lovely new hymns from the new purple book and the Welsh hymns were all new to me although the tunes of Sloop John B and Home on the Range were familiar. It was also a chance to hear from young talent from the Unitarian chapels and churches in the district. Thank you to Julianne, Philip, Stephen and the Rev Eric Jones who organised this event and to the Rev Eric Jones and Stephen Wilson as our Conductor and Organist.

We look forward to plans for celebrating Aberdare's 150th Anniversary this year and have had details of a series of lectures to be held in Highland Place, Aberdare in May, June and October 2010.

The Three Churches Collaborative partnership meet soon on April 1st 2010. The group have now prepared a job description and specification, profile of churches, business plan and SWOT analysis. At our next meeting we will be agreeing on a Minister's Contract of Employment, potential schedule of services and an application to the Sustentation fund.

May I thank all who support our local congregations, lead services and who volunteer on the District Executive or Three Churches Partnership in the district.

Sarah Boyce

Highland Place Unitarian Church, Aberdare 1860 – 2010 One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary Public Lecture Programme (ALL events to be held at Highland Place Unitarian Church, Monk Street, Aberdare)		
Thursday, 27 th May 2010 at 7.30pm	Thursday 10 th June 2010 at 7.30pm	Thursday 7 th October 2010 at 7.30pm
<i>Religion and Revival: Aberdare in 1859/60</i>	<i>Radicalism and Unitarianism in Merthyr and Aberdare</i>	<i>Notable Unitarian Women</i>
Speaker Dr Chris Turner	Speaker Joe England	Speaker Rev. Dr Ann Peart
<i>Anyone interested is very welcome to attend There is no charge for the lectures – A collection will be taken</i>		

ABERDARE

Everyone was in good voice at the sponsored hymn singing session at Highland Place. More than fifty hymns were sung to raise funds for the Anthony Nolan Trust which raises money for research and the

treatment of Leukaemia. More than £600 was raised and we thank all those who took part in singing the fifty hymns and those who so generously sponsored the event.

The improvements at Highland Place continue apace. We now have a disabled access which will make it much easier for some of the members of the congregation and visitors, who find the steps to both the front of the building and the schoolroom a problem.

Mrs Marion Davies, who was my predecessor as Aberdare correspondent to this newsletter, celebrated her 90th birthday on 28th March. Marion regularly continues to attend both Church and Women's League and her letter writing skills are put to good use on behalf of the Church, particularly when a note of thanks, a cheery letter to a sick person or congratulations are required.

Highland Place first opened its doors on the 20th December 1860. The group who are organising the 150th celebrations on behalf of the congregation were anxious that an event be held as near to that time as possible to mark its importance. A grand service with tea to follow will be held on Sunday 19th December at 3pm. The President of the General Assembly has agreed to attend and invitations will be going out to local dignitaries. This service will take the place of the usual District carol service and we hope that there will be a good attendance from Unitarians in South East Wales and representation from South Wales.

At the end of March the Reverend Eric and Anne Jones will have been married for forty years. We extend the warmest of congratulations to them both and our best wishes for the future. Anne and Eric have devoted their whole lives to the Unitarian cause and continue to provide a huge contribution, even in retirement! May they enjoy many more happy, healthy years together.

Ella Lewis-Jones

CARDIFF UNITARIANS / UNDOIDIAID CAERDYDD

The last few weeks have been interesting and different for our congregation as we have spent less time than usual at the Friend's Meeting House. There has, however, been ample opportunity to spend time with our District friends at various gatherings.

At the beginning of March we were welcomed by the Cefncoed congregation at the joint Spring service of the Aberdare, Cardiff and Cefncoed members. A thoughtful service of beautiful readings and prayers commemorating Spring was followed by the usual sumptuous tea prepared by the Cefn members and we were delighted that Marjorie Collins and Ian McCarthy were able to join us there. It is a long time since Ian left Cardiff to live with his wife and family in Italy and it was good to share time with him and catch up on his news. He is hoping that a small group of Italian Unitarians can begin meeting together on a regular basis.

Sadly, only a few of our members were able to attend the District Cymanfa Ganu in Swansea.

Lis was able to attend a one day workshop in Bristol on the 13th February and this was organized by two members of the Worship Panel. It provided the opportunity to explore alternative forms of worship, some of which we already use in Cardiff. However, it was a good day spent in the company of forward looking Unitarians, most of whom came from the Western Union.

Also In February, Lis attended a weekend UCCN conference at Great Hucklow with Ella Lewis-Jones of Aberdare. The focus of the weekend was publicity both within and outside our congregations and during a very stimulating afternoon, two PowerPoint presentations were created by two women who before attending, didn't think they had the requisite skills! The purpose of the presentations was to 'get our congregation noticed' and it is hoped that one, or both, will form part of a series to be presented on YouTube. (please see separate article about the weekend).

The Cardiff Secretary attended a meeting with other church officers to hear proposals about the new Welsh Department General Secretary's job which will hopefully follow the retirement from the current post, of the Rev Eric Jones, in April 2011. The Cardiff congregation has agreed to part fund the initiative.

The Annual General Meeting of the United Nations (Cardiff Branch) was held on Friday 26th March and was attended by Sarah Boyce. Two speakers, Dr. John Weaver, a Lecturer at the Baptist College and the Rev Keith Kimber, Church in Wales both spoke about climate change.

Margaret Evans will attend the GA Annual Meetings in Nottingham, as will Lis Dyson-Jones. The theme this year is 'Valuing and Supporting Youth' and Sarah Boyce will attend the Youth Roadshow and other events on the Saturday.

Personal News

We extend good wishes for better health to Win John as the expected warmer weather reaches us and

to a speedy recovery from Scarlet Fever for Betty Evans's little granddaughter, Mali. Margaret Evans raised £200 for the League Project, 'Meningitis Trust' at a coffee morning in her home. Thanks to all who contributed.

Thought for Now

'Tell me and I'll forget; Teach me and I'll remember; Involve me and I will learn' (Benjamin Franklin)

Lis Dyson-Jones

CEFNCOED

WOMEN'S LEAGUE

We returned from our winter break to Women's League on the first Wednesday in February. We were pleased to join in fellowship again after the short break. We enjoyed an afternoon of memories and nostalgia when several members showed old photographs of family and friends. What a difference several years can do to faces, hairstyles, and figures(!). Our next meeting will be the Annual General Meeting when we shall welcome our friends from the District to Cefn Coed.

Gwen Everrit

HERE AND THERE

Hen Dŷ Cwrdd has seen a lot of activity over the past few weeks. Since the snow and ice cleared we've hosted a meeting of the District Executive, a 'cascade' meeting re. the post of Welsh Department Secretary, and a meeting of the Three Churches Collaborative Partnership Steering Group. On Sunday, 7th March we were pleased to welcome friends from Aberdare and Cardiff congregations to a joint service. Some of our members were able to attend the District Cymanfa Ganu at Swansea and thoroughly enjoyed the event and the opportunity to meet District friends.

Ken Morgan

NOTTAG

I mentioned our Christmas morning service in the last newsletter, what I *didn't* mention was that Jo Taylor King then went on to join hundreds of other people at the Christmas morning swim on Coney Beach. She went for total immersion –thanks, she says, to her brother! and raised a huge amount of £140 for charity which she divided between Tŷ Hafan and MacMillan Nurses. Well done Jo, we are really proud of you.

On Mothers' Day Dave and Annette were presented with their fourth grandson, Ruben. He did bring his own problems with him, bless him, he was 12 weeks early and weighed in at 2lb 2½oz, but he and his family, with the help of staff from Singleton Hospital, are all doing their best and hoping for a home coming in the not too distant future. May God hold you in the hollow of his hand Ruben.

I am pleased to say June Pattermore had a successful cataract removal last week, we all send her our best wishes, and to Jean Thomas also, who has spent the first year of her retirement with constant poor health.

Isn't it wonderful to see the daffodils at last?!

Avril Protheroe

SWANSEA

We are grateful to everyone who has helped us through the cold, dark months since Christmas. However, on the first day of Spring, with lovely Spring sunshine the church came alive. How lovely to see so many people fill the church and enjoy a delightful feast of music with young instrumentalists Rebekah Thomas and Elizabeth and Isabelle Rosenberg, and a vocalist Catrin Lewis to add to the enjoyment. To hear such a lovely volume of voices is a rare treat. The Rev Eric Jones once again showed his mastery as a conductor getting the most out of the gathering, giving both ladies and gentlemen chance to shine. Afterwards, the happy babble of voices filled Unity Hall as members caught up with each other's news from East, West and South Wales as they enjoyed a shared lunch. After all the visitors had gone, those who had been clearing away were just leaving at about 2pm when there was an unexpected blip. Mrs Freda Thomas fell backwards whilst trying to mount a steep curb opposite church and hit her head on the road. She was bleeding from a head wound and gave us all a fright.

First a paramedic arrived and, with help, got her up and sitting in the bus shelter with a large bandage around her head. Then the ambulance took her to Morriston Hospital where she had a check-up before being allowed home at 7.30pm, provided she had company overnight. Our thanks go to Glenys and Jack Merrell who followed behind the ambulance and stayed with Freda until she was discharged. None of these events stopped Freda chatting the whole time and we are satisfied she is OK, whilst High Street has one more blood-stained pothole. We are grateful to Freda for all the help she gave in the kitchen during the event and hope she has fully recovered. The Cymanfa Ganu is proving to be a popular event and let us hope it continues.

Pamela Taylor

TREBANOS

GELLIONNEN

We are still held up by damp/wetness problems in a far corner of the chapel, but in other ways things are moving on. Rev Eirion Phillips has restored the large paint-daubed memorial stone above the pulpit to its original milky whiteness – I suspect this required considerable skill and patience. The doorframe has been replaced and the old door re-hung making it possible to enter the building without fear of setting off the alarm. With the *old* doorframe in place, opening up the chapel had become a very hit and miss affair – there are those among us who might qualify as skilled house breakers these days.

We have had visitors – Joan and Stan Cook from the Edinburgh Church: Joan is a member of the Future Ministry Panel. More recently, Sarah Boyce took service bringing her parents-in-law Joy and Geoff with her. Sarah also brought a posy of flowers for each and every one of us on Mothering Sunday. Thank you – this was much appreciated.

Mrs Betty Williams has celebrated her 89th birthday and Angela and Sandor Nemeth have celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. Our love and congratulations to you all. Then, to Amelia Grace we say, “Welcome to this world.” Little Amelia is the granddaughter of Phil and Katherine Harris and she arrived on her great-grandfather’s birthday – what a gift! Grace James has written from Ontario telling us that she now has a great-great-grandson, Brooklyn born in Nottingham and a great-great-granddaughter, Carys Emily born in North Wales. Our love, prayers and good wishes go to these three young lives.

We now look forward to spring on the mountain. We are sometimes rewarded with a sighting of the red kite, and the moles seem to be extra specially busy these days. Gellionnen is a place where one becomes aware of the seasons.

‘Gone Wrong’ Chapel Notices

The church will host an evening of dining, super entertaining and gracious hospitality.

Potluck Supper. Sunday 5.00pm —prayer and medication to follow.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

Marian Littlepage

WICK

We have started a ‘New Decade’ with two new doors –to our chapel and vestry. This is a vast improvement in locks and ease of entry. It was on the day of the Cymanfa Ganu in our chapel that David Marsh had to use a crowbar –obtained from a member, to open the door, and then Alastair Rosenberg sorted out the lock for us. At last a brand new, good-looking door which is so easy to open.

Sadly ill health is continuing to affect our congregation... Joyce Davies will be starting a course of treatment in Cardiff, Margaret Escott is waiting for a date to go into hospital, as is our treasurer Mansel Lalis. We do hope they will be feeling better soon.

Helen, Anoop and Tanya Bhanaut represented us at the Cymanfa Ganu in Swansea. Tanya, assisted by her dad Anoop, read from the Bhagavad Gita. It was an excellent occasion. Rev Eric Jones is a witty and accomplished conductor and, together with Stephen Wilson as accompanist, ensured that we sang with gusto. The soloists were great, it was a wonderful District occasion. Our thanks to everyone who helped to make it such a success.

Our celebration of Spring and Easter will be held on April 4th at 3.00pm and we would love to welcome anyone who is able to join us.

Hold on to April, never let her pass!
Another year before she comes again.
So do not let April go—but hold her tight
Month of eternal beauty and delight.

Julianne Morgan

THE POWER OF BELIEF

Sparrows on the bird feeder eat hungrily. Some birds, unable to squeeze onto the feeder, jostle on the ground to share dropped seeds. The birds know where it's at. Of course, birds don't have the intelligence of humans, so their activities are limited. But they have the advantage that they are not subject to the destructive false beliefs which so often plague mankind.

In the case of religions, I am thinking of beliefs such as, "*Only members of our religion will go to heaven; all others will go to hell*"; "*We are the only ones who know the truth, therefore everyone must be converted to our religion*" and the extreme fundamentalist belief that, "*It is sometimes necessary to kill people in the service of religion*".

Fortunately, there are some churches that are not fragmented by false beliefs. The Unitarian Church is one of them. Individuals can gather there to honour God without having to conform to an externally imposed dogma. In these surroundings, there is freedom to live in accord with one's conscience. When there is so much suffering in the world, all of it resulting from false beliefs, it is of great value that such sanctuaries exist.

It is now time for us to leave all negative thinking. Instead let us visualize ourselves standing outside a non-dogmatic church on a clear, cool night. We see the church's spire silhouetted against the star-studded sky. There is magic in this star lit world, and the thought comes to us that stars are not dead, as science would have us believe, but are highly evolved spiritual beings, who, like us, use music as a means of communication.

As if in confirmation of this thought, softly in the silence, the subtle sounds of the stars start to impinge upon our souls. The sound grows, and soon a wondrous world of sound surrounds and astounds us with its strength and nobility. Both gladly and willingly we relax and float in this sea of sound. For awhile we are outside time. We are nowhere and everywhere.

Inevitably, the vision fades, yet the echo of the music lives on. It reminds us that we are forever an indispensable part of this Song, this Uni Verse, that is resonating throughout time and space, identifying itself with inconceivable beauty, as the One, Living, Beneficent Being, sometimes known as the Divine of All That Is, an aspect of God.

Alan Cohen

[Alan is a member of the Cardiff congregation]

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

I missed the Gymanfa Ganu at Swansea last Sunday: didn't feel up to it somehow. You have to feel in the mood to go to somewhere like that and it meant an early start in the morning and there were some nasty clouds around. I felt I would be taking someone else's seat in a car and I had missed having my hair done on Friday and, to be honest, I was in a bit of a mess. My cousin Gertie wasn't there either because she had gone away on a trip to some Pleasure Park or something. That was a last minute thing really and it was nice for her to have a day out.

Mind you, I had a bit of a conscience about it afterwards because Sally had come all the way from Cardiganshire on a coach and she was asking about me apparently. Sally and I have known each other for years. Met on one of the Llanmadog outings years ago when we were both Sunday School teachers. We only meet on such occasions as this now. Nice girl is Sally and we haven't seen each other for a long time now. I didn't think she'd come all that way 'cos she's not much of a singer. Well, she came anyway and was asking about me. They said I was alright but didn't feel up to it that morning. When they came back, they said it had been quite a nice day with plenty of food and some brought some home afterwards. I always like to support these things, you know. What I say is that if people like me don't go, who is going to be there? I'll make a special effort next year now and I'll tell Gertie too, not to book a trip on that day and we'll have a good old natter over food with Sally.

The Golden Eagle

BOOK REVIEW

Readers may be interested in two books on the subject of kindness. "The Art of Being Kind" by Atefan Einhorn and "On Kindness" by Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor. Not surprisingly, the writers of the two books, approach the subject from slightly different perspectives coming, as they do, from backgrounds in Philosophy, Psychology and History.

"The Art of Being Kind" is written by a European Philosopher who is concerned to make the reader aware of the connection between kindness and moral "goodness." That is, a life lived in the interests of the community in general and not purely in the interests of oneself. He goes on to suggest that kindness is an "art" which can be learned and the book contains some practical ideas to this end.

Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor in their book "On Kindness" effectively dissect the whole notion of kindness. They begin by discussing the idea that, in modern times, kindness is not valued and that there are many who believe that money and power are more important than kindness. The writers freely acknowledge that being kind is personally demanding. They tell us that: "kindness is always hazardous because it is based on a susceptibility to others, a capacity to identify with their pleasures and sufferings. Putting oneself in someone else's shoes, as the saying goes, can be very uncomfortable".

These two books make plain what kindness is all about. That it is far from simply being kind to those who are kind to us. It seems that "real" kindness demands much of us, both in giving of ourselves and showing compassion and understanding in the most difficult and challenging of circumstances. Both books also make explicit how much we all need kindness both psychologically and spiritually and they suggest that the dearth of genuine kindness in modern society lies at the root of its current fragmentation.

Ella Lewis-Jones

BOOKS THAT MAKE YOU THINK

Like Ella, you may have encountered a book that can only be described as 'thought provoking' or even 'inspirational'. If so, you are invited share that experience by writing a short review (not more than 200 words) that could be printed in the South East Wales Unitarian News.

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