

Vision

From the Parish of Casllwchwr & Gorseinon
Mehefin June 2021 | Rhifyn Issue 009



Community
comes together



Glynne's life of
service



The Gift
of Prayer



We are one church meeting in two locations,
St Catherine in Gorseinon and St David in Loughor.

Contact a member of our team

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The Vicar takes a day off every Friday, so please be aware that any messages left will not be attended to until the next working day. In the event of an emergency only, please contact a Warden.

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Book our Facilities

Our Facilities, which include a large Hall, several smaller meeting rooms and well equipped modern kitchen, are available for hire throughout the week. All our facilities offer wi-fi connectivity. Check availability at www.stcath.org.uk.

Contributions for the Magazine

Anyone wishing to contribute an article for the next edition of *Vision* should contact a member of the Editorial Team:

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Welcome

As the National Lockdown began in March 2020, we sent out details of how people could access alternative forms of worship, either on Zoom, YouTube or via telephone alongside a copy of the most recent *Vision* magazine to everyone. One year on, few of us could have predicted that we would still be experiencing such uncertainties and that social distancing and other restrictions would still be a part of everyday life.

For much of the year, our church buildings have been closed but this latest edition of *Vision* is evidence of the fact that we have continued to be church. We mark the creation of our new parish — Casllwchwr and Gorseinon — and celebrate the new opportunities that gives us to work together. We are one church now meeting in two places, in St Catherine's Gorseinon and St David's Loughor. We also celebrate how technology has continued to enable us to meet together as a church community for prayer, bible study and even virtual coffee mornings! You'll read how lockdown has not stopped the endeavours of our incredible Mothers' Union, and how meeting online has opened new doors for some like Karen Shadrach, as well as helping others, like Penny Harries who recently emigrated to Spain, to keep in touch with old friends here in Wales.

You'll read about how, in Lent, more than forty people from across the Llŵchwr Ministry Area got together to explore the Bible Society's *Bible Course*,

and about how twelve people even trained to be Lay Worship Leaders during the pandemic, thanks to the wonders of Zoom! Our recently licensed Lay Minister, Elizabeth Williams shares a little of her journey into a new ministry, and we also rejoice with our curate, Glynne James, on the news that he was awarded the BEM in the Queen's New Year Honours list. Other news includes how our children and young people have continued 'exploring' together in lockdown, and how our whole community pulled together to support the most vulnerable and the elderly during the challenges of the last year.

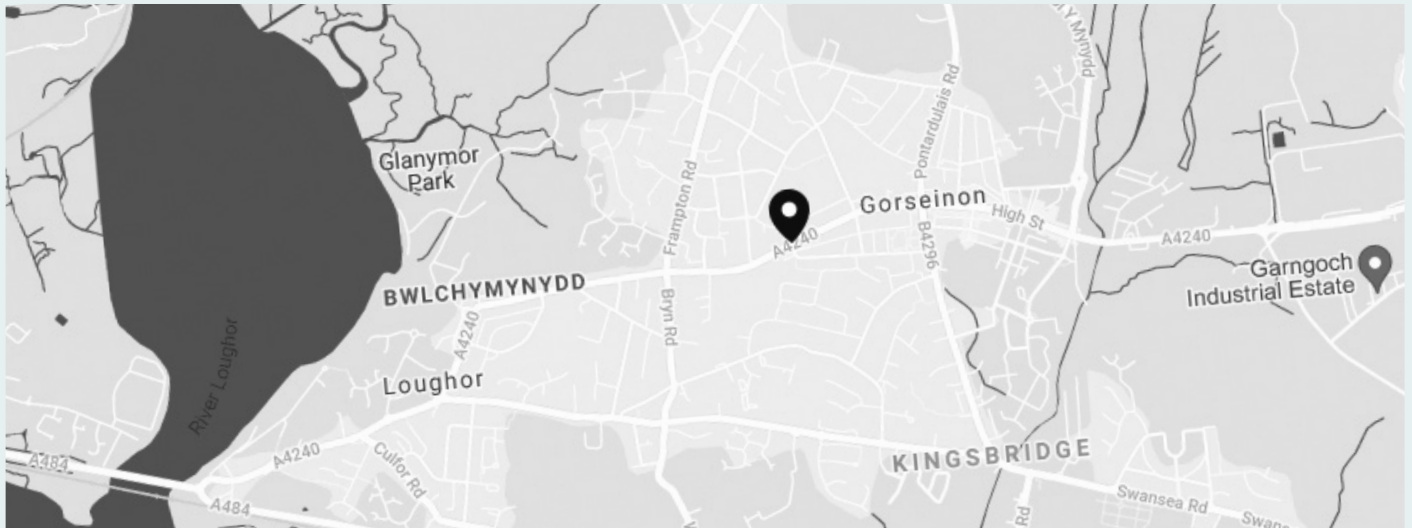
In this edition, we will celebrate the love of Chloe and Joe, Anna and Rhod, and Nicky and Katie. Their well organised marriage plans were blown apart by the pandemic and their wedding days were not as they had anticipated, but their stories are a poignant reminder that love can conquer all. We also pay tribute to some much loved members of our church family who are sadly no longer with us, Betty Thomas, Bill Powell, Eleanor Davies and Ron Parry.

I do hope that you'll be able to sit down, relax and enjoy the read.

With my love, always,

Adrian

New Parish born in lockdown



On Monday 21 October 2019, the PCCs of Gorseinon and Loughor held a meeting at St David's Church in Loughor, chaired by Canon Peter Brooks as Area Dean, to discuss how we might work together to further God's mission for his church in this area, and it was unanimously agreed that this mission would be better served if we began working together as a single benefice.

After consultation with congregations at each of the three churches — St Catherine, St David and St Michael — it was later decided that the new parish should be called the Parish of Casllwchwr and Gorseinon, which came into existence as we entered into lockdown this time last year.

Whilst the lockdown has, in many ways, hindered our well-thought-through plans for bringing both parishes together, it is in many ways significant that the new parish should come into being at such a time as this.

Faced with the reality of Jesus' death, the first disciples imposed a lockdown upon themselves. They hid behind the carefully bolted doors of the upper room in Jerusalem, afraid of what was going on in the world around them. Jesus had been crucified. Would they, who had dared to follow him, be next to the cross? But it was there that the risen Jesus met

with them. He gave the anxious and fearful disciples the gift of his Holy Spirit, which empowered them to overcome their anxiety and fear, and to go back to Jerusalem to share the Good News.

However we understand different parts of the Bible, we know that the disciples experienced this change of heart, because the persecution that they endured afterwards is well documented, not just in the Bible but in history too, and without their new found endurance to share what they had heard and seen, it is unlikely that we would be a Christian community today.

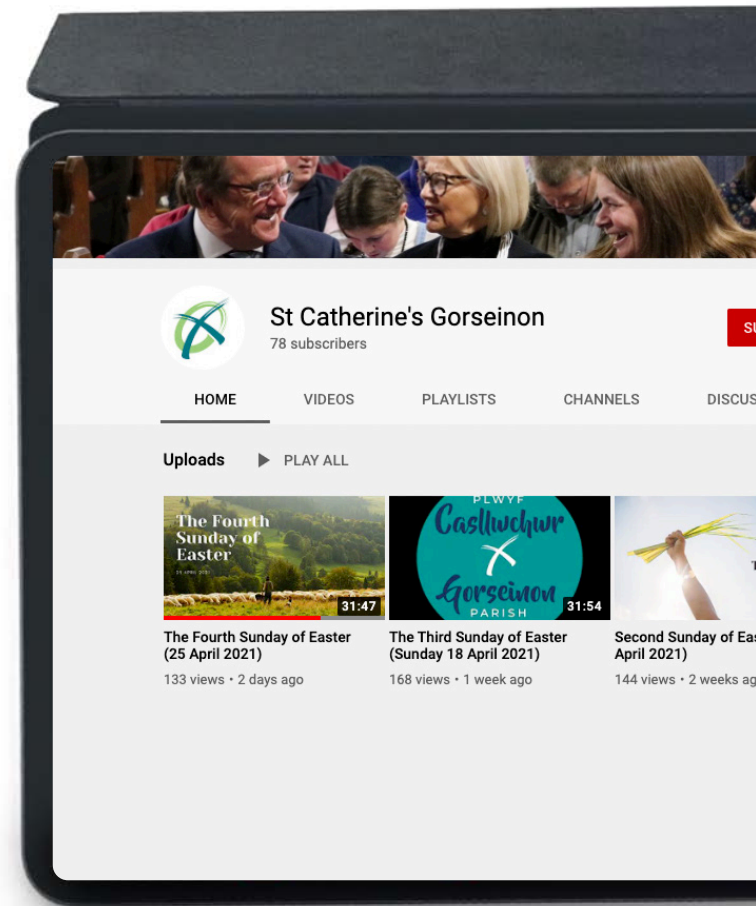
Becoming a single parish unites us as the family of God in this area and gives us new opportunities to work together for the sake of the mission of the church. However, becoming a new parish whilst in lockdown is also an encouragement for us to share the Good News about Jesus with courage, just as those first disciples did. Our inheritance of faith is a reminder that we are totally, unconditionally loved — no matter who or what we are, and no matter what we've done or failed to do — and as an anxious world begins to venture out into the 'new normal', the message of that great love is certainly one worth sharing.



The church left the building, and got tech savvy online!

Although we may be attracted by someone's good looks, most of us would agree that beauty is much more than skin deep! In much the same way, although meeting together in our beautiful church buildings brings joy and encouragement, it is blindingly obvious that church is much more than bricks and mortar — and if we had a pound for every time the clergy reminded us of that, we'd probably be worth a fortune!

Jesus says, 'by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13.35), so meeting together is important because we point others to Jesus as we enjoy fellowship and interact with each other in a loving way. Gathering to worship together is also important as it gives the opportunity to grow as disciples and to encourage others to do the same. A single coal generates very little heat, but put alongside others in the grate, it soon becomes a blazing fire that produces much heat, and in much the same way the encouragement of other Christians



can help us to bear much fruit for the Kingdom too.

But just like we plug a mobile phone into a charger to be able to enjoy many hours of conversation and connection with others, gathering together on a Sunday is simply an opportunity to charge our spiritual batteries so that we are equipped and able to connect with Jesus and to do life with him for the rest of the week. So meeting together in a specific place at a specific time is important, but it's not everything.

The National lockdown began in the run up to Easter last year, remembering the time when the Twelve Disciples who had given up everything to follow Jesus, found themselves perplexed and terrified following his death. Fearful that Jesus' opponents might soon come after his disciples too, they placed themselves into a self-imposed lockdown in Jerusalem and it was there that Jesus met with them. He gave them peace and he empowered them with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This changed

Sunday 27 September 2020

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Led by our Worship Leaders, Sonia, Cos, Karen, Gill & Ethan
www.stcath.org.uk



everything because they were no longer fearful and eager to flee Jerusalem, but keen to stare danger in the face and to be the hands and feet of Jesus to others. This turn around in the attitude of the disciples undeniably happened, as we only gather today because of their testimony, and the story of how their fear turned dramatically into courageous faith is one of the most compelling pieces of evidence for the resurrection. They either believed it to be true, or they were simply insane to be prepared to face the kind of persecution that came their way head-on. The story is also a poignant reminder that Jesus can meet with his disciples anywhere, even in lockdown.

Over the last year, there has been a stop-start approach to live congregational services, but we have continued to be church, meeting together and with Jesus too. Providing online alternatives has meant quickly learning new skills, grappling with new technologies, and adapting to use what was available or within the constraints of copyright. Each week for the last year, whether or not we've been able to meet for in-person services, a committed team of volunteers have worked to put together an online alternative, initially as an audio podcast on SoundCloud but later, after overcoming our camera shyness, as a video broadcast on YouTube too. This has enabled us to connect with many in our regular congregation who were isolating or shielding, and also to reach out to a whole new group of people too.

"It's been good to see people getting stuck

in, overcoming their fear of technology, to read or pray or even to help with leading one of our online services," Adrian, our Vicar, explained.

"Knowing how to negotiate the complexities of the technology — recording, and video editing — was not something I was used to, so it's been a very steep learning curve. Fortunately though there has been a good team of people keen to lend a hand in these challenging, and very unprecedented circumstances."

"In the beginning, there were some very late nights as many

of us had to quickly master a whole new set of skills, and even a year on we are still learning."

"But what we've put together online has been greatly enriched by the willingness of so many to work together. People have stepped out of their comfort zones to record themselves reading or praying — and Andrew Knight, Glynne James and Elizabeth Williams (our Parish Lay Minister) have done an amazing job of working with me to provide weekly sermons too — we are so blessed to have such an amazing team!"

"Also in lockdown, our services have been enhanced by the gifts of our growing number of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders from Loughor and Gorseimon. Many were already well established and used to undertaking this important ministry in the Church, while others have only just begun by completing the diocese's training course for Lay Worship Leaders during lockdown."

"While working together as a team may feel strange to some who have been used to worship being led exclusively by the Vicar, each of them have different gifts and working together means that we can complement each other, drawing on the different strengths of the team members. Whilst we have a good and growing team, there is always room for more — so why not think about giving it a go?"

Grappling with technology is not everyone's strength, but one of those who has been helping others get to grips with it is Rob Hulme, who has helped many people unsure of how to record

contributions for services themselves, by using Zoom.

“Zoom technology has allowed members of our congregation to read or pray for our alternative online services, even if they were unsure of how to record themselves,” Rob explained.

“Zoom permits you to record a session, so that means all our volunteers have to do is to read or pray while the meeting host records them, and then the host can edit the recording at their leisure. We actually managed a number of successful recordings this way for people who wouldn’t normally have tackled the technicalities of recording themselves or getting the recording to the program editor.”

We’ve also endeavoured, thanks to the hard work of Heather Culliford, to continue to distribute our bulletin each week with a collection of familiar hymns, prayers and Bible readings. This was especially appreciated by those who were not so tech savvy!

Early on in the pandemic we wrote to everyone with details of how they could also access DailyHope, a free national telephone line, offering music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of the phone, if they were not able to access the internet. This service is still available by calling 0800 804 8044.

There have been also opportunities to turn

isolation into connection with others by joining lots of activities during the week, either on Zoom or by using a freephone telephone number to listen in to Zoom sessions. These activities have included two Bible studies, a prayer meeting, smaller Connect Groups at different times throughout the week, and virtual coffee mornings too. Although these coffee mornings sadly involved boiling your own kettle and bringing your own cake, they were a great opportunity to enjoy a chat and to connect with others during the week.

“The coffee mornings online were a really good opportunity to get to know each other,” explained Rob Hulme, who helped to coordinate the events.

“We chatted about everything — football, DIY, and travel (remember that!) — and a number of regulars came from our three churches, and even by people who don’t come to church, all keen to enjoy a morning’s natter.”

“For me, the success of these virtual coffee mornings is measured by the fact that, whilst they start at 11am, and are only supposed to last an hour, we regularly are still chatting at 2pm!” Rob explained.

“Like any coffee morning, people are free to drop in and out as their time permits, so why not think about coming along?”

The Wedding of Nicky and Katie

After many unexpected delays, Nicky Jones, a faithful member of our church family, was finally able to get married to his fiancé, Katie, over the summer.

Initially, all was going to plan. We could see an excitement growing in Nicky as the weekly banns were announced each Sunday morning and the big day approached. It was cruel the way the first Covid-19 lock-down in Wales halted

the actual wedding so close to the actual event. While disappointing in the extreme, they both bore it well and our hearts were with them, highlighting at the same time the tribulations of so many prospective couples across the country who’s plans were thrown to the Covid wind.

However, once the restrictions were eased it became possible to hold a reduced “socially-distanced”

ceremony for them. Numbers attending were limited, but none of this affected the triumphant entry of the radiant bride with her attending train of delightful bridesmaids and page.

The simple ceremony of exchange of vows and rings was as timeless as ever, presided over by the Rev Andrew Knight, after which followed a brief message and the signing of the register.

Giving up Tuesday evenings this Lent, to gain Biblical treasure that will last forever

Rather than giving up chocolate this year, more than forty people from numerous churches across the Llŵchwr Ministry Area have given up their Tuesday evenings in Lent to journey through the Bible Society's Bible Course.

The eight-session course, run each week on Zoom, is helping us explore the big picture of the Bible. Often, when we think of the Bible, it is words like 'big', 'complex', 'confusing' or 'old' that come to mind, but the Bible Course is designed to break it into bitesized chunks, and turn confusion into understanding, in turn increasing people's confidence, equipping them to read the Bible more effectively and to help them to see the relevance of the world's best selling book in their daily lives.

In each interactive session, video teaching, group discussion and personal reflection are combined, and recommended daily reading in-between sessions helps us understand how all the different books of the Bible come together as part of one incredible story.

Using a unique storyline, the Bible Course shows how key events, books and characters fit together. Two of those who have been following the course during Lent have been Paul and Margaret Holland from St Barnabas' Church in Waunarlwydd.

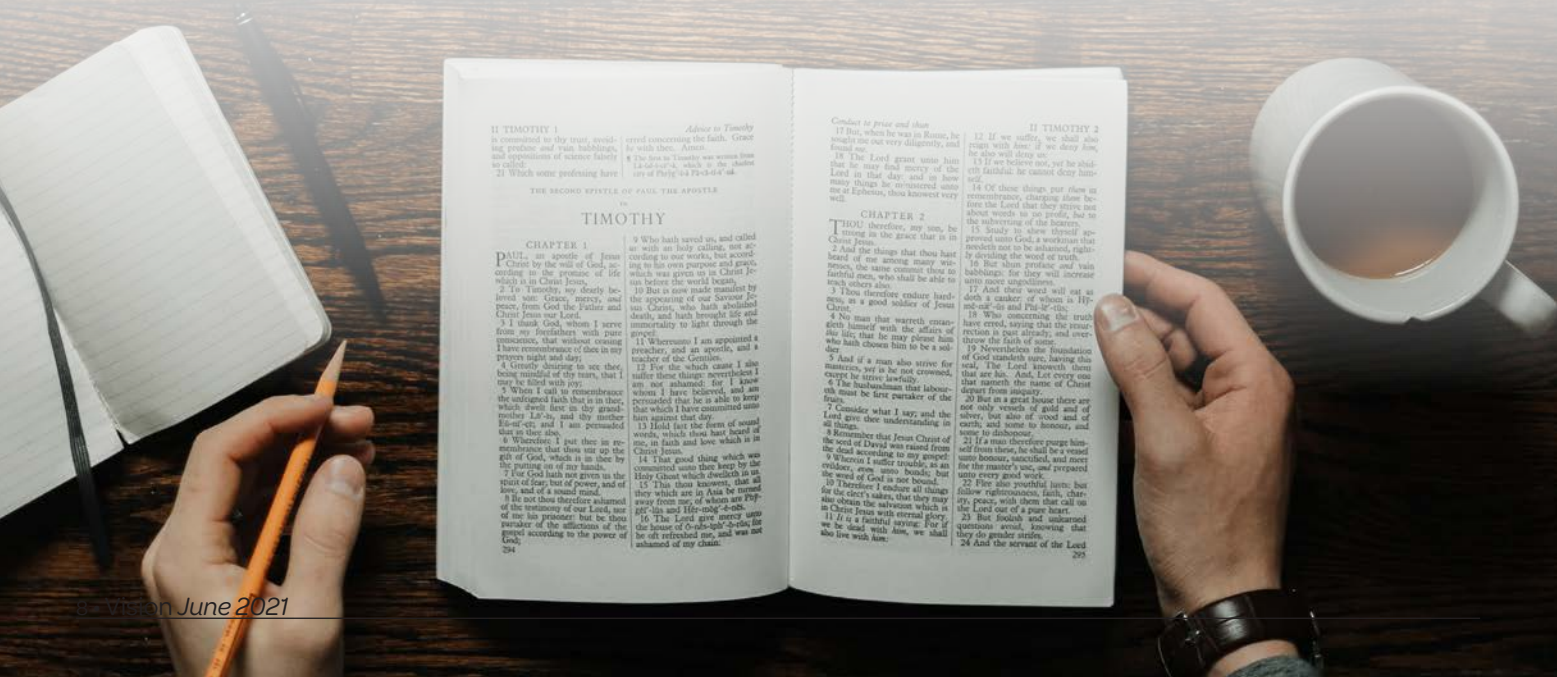
"Margaret and I have found the course very informative, especially the explanation of the timeline of the Old Testament, which helped us to understand everything more clearly," Paul said.

"The video explanations are very good and explain in some detail all of the numerous stages of the Bible."

Each week, there are two short videos that explore a different aspect of the Bible in order, including 'Creation & Covenant', 'Exodus & Promised Land', 'Judges & Kings', 'Exile & Prophets', 'Jesus & the Gospels', 'Acts & the Church' and 'Revelation'.

Our journey has included looking at the impact of the Bible on music and film, politics and social reform, literature, language, education and even sport! It's also been good to remember that the Bible continues to be an immensely popular book, with over 400 million copies being sold and distributed each year before we even begin to count the millions of downloads.

Translated in part or whole into over 3,000 languages, the Bible is a unique collection of books written over a period of 1,500 years by various authors including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesman and scholars. It includes three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and



The Bible Course



Greek) and covers hundreds of different subjects, yet it is old and so needs interpreting. The Bible Course encourages people to ask two key questions as they read it, to help them do just that: ‘What did this mean in its original context?’ and ‘What does it mean for my life today?’ Context is everything. Without it the bible just doesn’t make sense. The bible authors were writing to specific audiences and cultures at specific times, so what they said made absolute sense then. Two thousand years later, in a culture with differing understandings, if we don’t understand the author’s original intention, we’ll miss the truths those biblical passages still contain for us today.

“After each video, we go into our breakout groups to chat about the video and the Bible readings that relate to the presentation. It has been very interesting to hear our group members interpretation of what we have just heard and read,” Paul said.

“Adrian always says that there is *no wrong answer* to any of the questions. His explanation is that we are all on the same journey and — even if we are at different stages of our journey — by travelling together we can learn from each other.”



The Bible Course explores how the story of the Bible fits together. Starting with Creation — in Genesis — we glimpse the paradise that we were made for before sin enters the world, and we follow Israel down to Egypt (through the story of Joseph) and — in Exodus — witnessing God setting captives free through Moses. Through cycles of judges and the era of the kings, we encounter exceptional leaders (like David and Solomon) before hearing the voice of the prophets and the lament of the exiles. Then, into the New Testament and the Gospels, we see Jesus establish God’s kingdom and give humanity a new start. Now his followers bring hope to the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in Revelation, we glimpse how the story will end — paradise lost will be regained. Lent may have finished, and this Bible course completed, but the forty plus people who gave up sixteen hours of their life to attend it, would agree it was time very well spent. They will continue to benefit every day in their individual bible reading, from what they have learned about this incredible book within it.

Love conquers all as Rhod and Anna tie the knot



Anna Jenkins shares how her wedding day may not have been the ‘perfect’ celebration she had planned, yet there was still so much to be thankful for as she was able to tie the knot with fiancé Rhodri just days before new restrictions would have made it impossible.

Almost everything about mine and Rhod’s story has been beautifully unique, and I knew from the very start that our future together was going to be so. We met in 2017 whilst Rhod was training to be a teacher at the school I was working in as a teaching assistant at the time. Funnily enough, it wasn’t until after Rhod finished at the school that our interest in one another began. After many months of getting to know each other, it was obvious to us both that we were becoming more than just friends. Fast forward to the 20 August 2019...we got engaged and two

weeks later, our wedding was booked! The planning and preparation started straight away, but our plans were soon in question when Covid-19 started to spread fast in Wales. After many teary conversations with family, friends, and Adrian at the prospect of not being able to get married on 4 April 2020 as planned, we were both determined to not let a global pandemic stop us from being husband and wife — what a stressful yet exhilarating time it was.

It had always been my dream to have a huge wedding with all my friends and family there, wear a

white wedding dress, have my bridesmaids with me, and a reception filled with dancing, speeches, food, and drink — I suppose this is what most brides want for their big day. However, this was not how things turned out. All our plans, ideas and expectations were taken away from us when Covid restrictions meant that we could no longer have the big white wedding I had dreamt of. I vividly remember going for a walk with Rhod one evening after work and saying to him ‘we have to get married somehow! There must be a way we can do it.’ It was in that moment that I realised more than ever how much I simply wanted to marry Rhod. It was no longer about planning for the wedding day and all the fancy details; it was now about planning how we could possibly make our vows. Both our parents agreed that this was a sensible idea, considering that at this point, we had no idea how long restrictions were to be in place for or when the next chance to get married would be. I didn’t hesitate in ringing Adrian immediately to see what could be done to get us married somehow before a full lockdown was announced. We faced another bump in the road, another obstacle that attempted to stop us and we really thought that our chances were ruined, once and for all. It conspired that my bans hadn’t been read in my local parish church, meaning that we legally weren’t allowed to get married — what a kick in the guts. The churches in Wales were now forced to close for their Sunday meetings and therefore there was no way our bans could even be possibly read. I remember Adrian telling me this on the phone and my heart completely sank. But then he said, ‘there is one way you can do it...’. I had butterflies in my stomach as he began to explain about a licence we could apply and pay for in special circumstances that overrides bans being read. Adrian barely finished his sentence before I could jump in and say, ‘How? Where?!’ Moments later and I was arranging the licence and preparing our family to get ready for our wedding in the next few days! It also so happened one of the last of these licenses to be granted before yet more restrictions were imposed. God’s faithfulness and grace was really shown. It was such a crazy whirlwind, but we are so grateful to Adrian for all his help and support in helping us find a way to get married.

On the 20 March 2020, we got married in St Catherine’s Church, just in time before the national lockdown. There were only ten people present,



including Adrian and the Church Warden who kindly videoed the ceremony. It was the most surreal feeling walking down the huge aisle with empty pews, but nonetheless, the most incredible. I never would have imagined that my Father-in-law would be our photographer, or that my Dad would be my maid of honour, or that our reception would be in Rhod’s parents living room, and I certainly didn’t expect to be married with some of our nearest and dearest not there. Our wedding was far from what I had imagined, but our story is one of steadfast love, faith, favour, and true blessing. Love really does conquer all.

Providing things change and the restrictions then allow, we are planning a blessing at St Catherine’s and reception party for this summer where all our family and friends can finally come together to celebrate our marriage. What a joyful day it will be!

Exploring together in lockdown

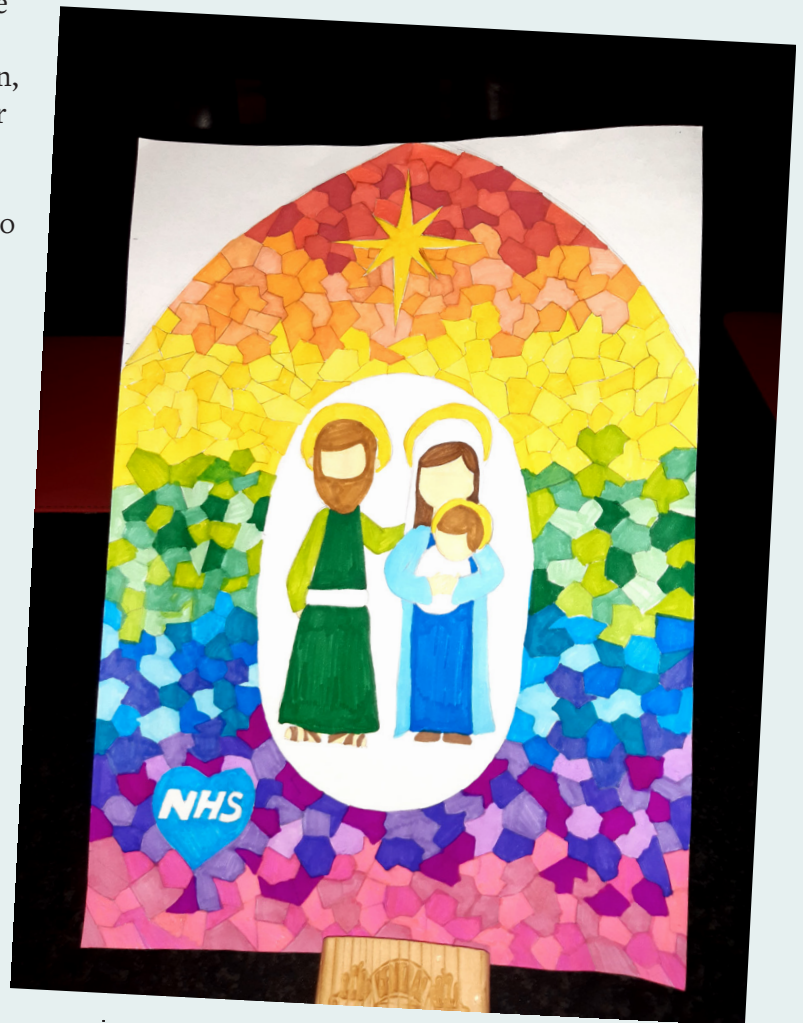
Well, what a difference a year makes! As the anniversary of the UK lockdown passes, it's astonishing to believe our Explorers children, parents and team have not met up physically for over twelve months. But, just as St Catherine's website says, *'the church has left the building'* and so too did Explorers, and we've had a year of two halves ever since.

During the chaos of the first lockdown, our Children's and Families Worker at the time, Rowena, did an amazing job of moving Explorers online, and every week we had a new YouTube video to look forward to watching. In these she introduced us to different Bible stories, played online games and rose to the challenge to keep us crafting, one of the things we loved when we were meeting up face-to-face. She organised worksheets, colouring sheets and craft activities but the children unanimously agree that the weeks they got to make microwavable cakes were their favourite!

No one could have predicted the impact and changes that Coronavirus would bring to our lives, and sadly in October we said goodbye to Rowena when she made the difficult decision to relocate to North Wales. We were able to meet via Zoom and say goodbye, but wished we could have done that in person. Another person we had a goodbye Zoom with is Penny, who has worked with our children and youth for over twenty-five years, as she moved to begin a new life in Spain. However, one of the benefits of Explorers then transferring to online, live meetings is that Penny is currently still joining us! You can read more about her lockdown experience in this edition of Vision.

Live Zoom Explorers has not been for everyone, and by October many children were understandably 'Zoomed' out from school, but for those who could face more screen time, we've been meeting every Sunday and Ella sums it up for children and parents alike saying "My favourite part is getting to see each other each week, and catching up." Sam, as well as learning about Jesus, likes the fact he can start playing with his toys as soon as Explorers finishes, rather than having to travel home first!

During the autumn we investigated what 'The armour of God' is, and why God encourages us to wear it each day, to live our best life possible. This is based on Ephesians 6. 10-18. As wearing actual battle



armour isn't something any of us (thankfully) has to do regularly, we spent time thinking about what our twenty-first century equivalent would be, ending in the first ever Explorer's fashion show! The entries were very creative, and will help the children put the wisdom of these verses into practice today. For example, instead of wearing a breastplate (of truth), Sam decided to wear a school jumper. Why? Because in school he learns lots of true facts, just like ones he learns about in the Bible. And Hallie chose a pair of 'heelies' (trainers with wheels on them) on her feet not only to remind her to have feet that spread the Good News of God's peace with others, but also to help her do it faster.

We missed our usual Christmas celebrations but did get to meet up briefly once, on a wet and windy day, as families around Gorseinon collected Christingle activity packs from the Church Hall, before we all sat and watched a pre-recorded Christingle service, and lit our candles in our own houses.



Since New Year we've been enjoying investigating what life would really have been like for Jesus and his brothers and sisters growing up in first century Israel. Would he have gone to school? What did he learn? What household chores would he have been expected to do? Sam says, "I've learned that in Jesus' time the girls did the cooking and the boys went into the fields. I like cooking so I don't think it would be

nice for me and I'm happy we can do a bit of both" What games would he have played with his friends? What kind of food would he have eaten? We even tried baking our own 'biblical bread' and concluded it was nicest straight out of the oven, but not as nice as twenty-first century bread. It's made Ella realise how lucky she is growing up now, and not at the time when Jesus did.

Whilst we've still been able to connect online, and have fun together, with online scavenger hunts and quizzes as well as getting to make stuff, children, parents and leaders have found not being able to physically see each other difficult. As the UK slowly begins to come out of the most recent strict lockdown measures, and the weather gets warmer, we might be able to slowly make our way back to the church grounds, and even inside the building for future meet ups, and dare I say it, hugs! What a fantastic day that will be!

But until then, we look forward to one more short physical catch up as Easter activity packs are shortly given out to the community, just like our Christingle packs were. The church may still have left the building, but our God remains in control on the throne, and Explorers will be remembering, praising and celebrating this Easter time, even if we can only do it via our computer screens.

Explorers currently meets 10-10.45am on Sunday mornings via Zoom. Once it is legal and safe to do so we shall return to meeting physically in the church, and all children are welcome to join us.

For further information about Explorers please see information on [St Catherine's Church website](http://StCatherine's Church website), or contact clare@stcath.org.uk.



Community rallies around to support the isolated and most vulnerable during lockdown



Councillor Kelly Roberts shares how a huge community effort brought people together, providing help and support for the most vulnerable during the lockdown period.

When news began to emerge about a virus, it was nothing more than a news item highlighting events in parts of the world that were far from home. Most of us gave the first murmurs about the virus little more than a second thought, believing that it was unlikely to reach our shores let alone to result in a global pandemic, in a country wide lockdown and even an economic crisis that would leave thousands of individuals out of work and businesses struggling.

But when it was announced that the nation was going in to lockdown in March 2020, things suddenly started to become very real. It was an uncertain time and a challenge we have never had to face before.

“As a community we have a track record of helping

one another and the light during this dark time was the way people came together to protect the most vulnerable,” explained Kelly Roberts.

“A group of people, including the Vicar, local councillors and other community leaders quickly got together to consider what support we might be able to provide, especially for those who were elderly and most vulnerable.”

Ideas shared in the meeting included ensuring that people had access to food and vital medicines, as





well as enabling people to turn their isolation into connection by speaking to others on a regular basis.

“The longstanding Trussell Trust Food Bank in Gorseinon had to close temporarily because social distancing was difficult in the Gorseinon Institute, so to fill the void we decided to set up a temporary Food Hub at St Catherine’s Church.”

“I am not exaggerating when I say we started off by winging it. We had a bag of food, zero experience and no money. But we put out a Facebook post asking for help and soon enough the donations came flooding in,” Kelly explains.

“The first ‘food shop’ at Asda is definitely not one I will forget anytime soon. Picture the Reverend Dr Adrian Morgan and myself, armed with two trolleys and a scan and go zapper neither of us had ever used before. In what can only be described as Gorseinon’s version of supermarket sweep, we succeeded in zapping our way to the tune of £250 in tins, toilet roll and pasta.”

“At the checkout, the Reverend pressed the ‘wrong’ buttons (Adrian will dispute this), so we had to self-checkout. The looks we had would make you laugh. Not just because we had to scan each and every tin, roll and pasta bag again, but because we had forgotten to bring any boxes or bags to pack our massive haul.”

It was not long though before the operation began to pick up steam. The group arranged for eighteen thousand leaflets with key contact details — including those of the Vicar and other community leaders — to be delivered to homes in Gorseinon

and Loughor, inviting people to get in touch if they needed help of any kind.

“The phones soon began to ring, and it soon became clear that people were anxious — especially the elderly — about how they might access food and crucial medical supplies,” explained Reverend Dr Adrian Morgan.

“We set up the emergency Food Hub at St Catherine’s and people soon began to send us generous donations, which enabled us to begin to bulk buy food supplies and put together emergency food parcels for people who were having to isolate, shield, or stay at home because they were elderly or vulnerable.”

The Food Hub, open on a Tuesday and Thursday, opened its doors on 16 March and provided more than 1,500 food parcels to families in the area.

On 1 October, the day-to-day running of the Food Hub was then transferred back to the Trussell Trust team, who continued to provide help and support, whilst working out of St Catherine’s Church.

“The support from the community exceeded our expectations, and when we handed the Food Hub back to the Trussell Trust there was a significant amount of money left over,” Kelly explained.

“We were pleased to hand over a fully stocked hub as well as a donation of £15,000 to the Trussell Trust to enable them to continue this vital work.”

The team soon recruited 140 volunteers and created a Covid-19 strategy to support the isolated, this included providing:

- **Shopping buddies**, which involved volunteers being buddied up with isolating people to ensure that their weekly shop was done and delivered.
- **Phone buddies**, which connected volunteers with isolating people for a regular chat on the telephone.
- **Prescription collection**, which saw a small team of PPU's (Prescription Picker Uppers) going out into the community to collect and deliver prescriptions from four pharmacies in Gorseinon.

We delivered over 4,000 prescriptions, linked up 80 shopping buddies and 142 phone buddies.

“Every morning, people would ring the Vicarage with requests to pick up prescriptions,” Adrian explained.

“I was one of many people who would compile a list that was then sent through to the relevant pharmacy and at the end of the day, one of our amazing volunteers would collect and deliver those prescriptions.”

“It was hard work, and it sometimes felt as if the phone was not going to stop, but I enjoyed the chance to chat with so many people and to learn a little about their lives and what was important to them,” Adrian said.

“People were generally so grateful and encouraging of what we were trying to do for the community, which helped. Sometimes people would even ring back later that day to say that they had received their

much needed prescription,” Adrian explained.

The number of people in our community that stepped up to help is truly heartwarming. Thank you to the volunteers at the Food Hub, the shopping and phone buddies, the prescription collection and delivery teams, and the girls from the ‘on the wall’ group for their hard work and dedication.

A massive thank you too goes to all those that donated food, money, gifts, stock, bags, raffle prizes, time, awareness, and to those who organised online singing events, street bingo and raffle draws to raise money.

Thank you to our local businesses for their support and donations, especially during a time of such great uncertainty for them.

There were also donations from Gorseinon and Llŵchwr Town Councils, Grovesend Community Council, as well as six county councillors (Kelly Roberts, Jan Curtice, Andrew Stevens, Will Evans, Christine Richards and Robert Smith), and large cash donations from individuals, local churches, foundations, groups and organisations.

This shows how our community came together in a time of crisis. The Gorseinon and Llŵchwr response to the pandemic is something we can be proud of, as we helped hundreds of people and handed a fully stocked Food Hub back to the Gorseinon Food Bank, which is now based at St Catherine’s Church. We have been supported beyond expectation. If anything good can come of this awful situation, it is knowing that we have a community that we can rely on when we need it most.



Twelve new Worship Leaders licensed by the Bishop

Andrew Knight celebrates the licensing of twelve new Worship Leaders during the Lockdown, explores their role and shares how they are a resource of great value to the Church.

Those of you who follow the Sunday online service will have met a number of our Parish Worship Leaders, but may be less clear what they are licensed by the Bishop to do. The Loughor four are the longest established, having led monthly services since January 2019. They, and a new group from Gorseinon, trained in the Ministry Area, as part of the move to new patterns.

We have had Lay Readers (now often called Licensed Lay Ministers, LLM) for many years. They go through several years of training to lead services and preach, as well as sharing in pastoral work. In Casllwchwr and Gorseinon, we have Liz Williams, sometimes seen in her official robes of black cassock, white surplice and long blue scarf (distinguished from the black worn by deacon or priest). Worship Leaders do a shorter training – most recently here in summer 2020, when twelve volunteers worked through the six weeks of the St Padarn's course with the Vicar and myself.

That was good fun, if also hard work! A mixture of theory, discussion and practice, we thought through what makes for good worship; what needs to be included, and how to fit it together to produce an effective and enabling service that leads the congregation in their worship to God. And it's not all about the music and singing. We considered practicalities, such as how to be heard and understood, and also the many possibilities for dramatic or visual presentation. There are different ways of praying, and language styles to use with them. There was an important session on Worship as Mission – partly the vital importance of welcoming the congregation to worship alongside us, but also the need to offer material at different levels for different ages and levels of Christian maturity.

The last session addressed the practical issues of preparing and leading a service.

Somebody is going to be thinking, "Don't we have clergy to do this?" and it is really important to emphasise that in reality we need a wider group of people leading worship than just the clergy team. Why? Not just because there aren't enough clergy, or they get overworked. Because Worship Leaders bring a range of personality and experience to their role. No one priest, or even two or three, will be able to speak effectively to every member of a congregation in which there are (or ought to be!) young and old, lifelong attenders and new converts, introverts and extroverts, locals and incomers, academic and practical. With a varied group of people planning and leading worship, there is a wider sympathy and a greater reach to the community.

This is emphasised in the Church in Wales "Professional Ministry Guidelines" for clergy, which state: (6.3) "Clergy should promote collaborative ministry across the whole range of church life and activity." And to make it clear, "(6.5) Where appropriate, clergy should involve others in leadership of worship, providing training and preparation as necessary to support them." When this happens, worship is not a "spectator sport", where the efforts of the few are criticised by passive observers, but the activity of everyone, undertaken with greater understanding and engagement. People who know about worship, what it involves and why it matters, are a resource of great value. They are better participants, whether "up front" or in the "congregation". Please remember to support, encourage and pray for your Worship Leaders, as well as Readers, and Clergy.

Chloe and Joe's Lockdown Wedding



Joe and I got engaged on 21 July 2019 (after ten days of me unknowingly sabotaging his attempts!). We knew we didn't want a long engagement, so after a couple of months to let it sink in, we got to planning. I had always wanted an Autumn wedding, so we set the date for 12 September 2020.

At the start, the planning was pretty straight forward. I like to be organised, so we got a lot of the big things sorted early on and booked our ceremony at St Catherine's and reception venue at Ocean View Windmill, Gower. From November to February everything was going pretty smoothly, and then March arrived. All of a sudden the world descended into chaos and our wedding plans were turned upside down.

What followed was a stressful six months that largely consisted of holding off planning and waiting for any Government announcements regarding weddings, be they good or bad. We had briefly toyed with the idea of postponing the wedding to 2021, but we both knew that we just wanted to get married, and we could always have a big party at a later date.

So, we waited. There were times when it was a real struggle to stay positive, with cases rising and no

sign of restrictions lifting regarding weddings. We also didn't know whether our wedding insurance would cover the money we had already put towards the reception if the day wasn't able to go ahead, but we trusted that God would make a path for us to get married.

We tentatively continued to make plans with the hope that restrictions would ease enough to allow us some sort of wedding, and finally, around six weeks before our wedding date, the Welsh government announced that weddings with receptions of up to thirty people could take place. Whilst it wasn't the original eighty day-guests and a hundred and ten evening guests we had originally planned; we were over the moon! And what's more, the number of guests invited to the ceremony were restricted by space to safely socially distance and not by number. Once we heard the news, we headed down to St Catherine's as soon as we could with a tape measure and did the maths. Including ourselves, Adrian and the photographer, we could fit in everyone that needed to be there. We couldn't believe it!

Whilst we were disappointed that we weren't able to have everyone there, partly due to restricted

numbers and partly due to family members living abroad and/or being unable to travel, we were so thankful that we would be able to have something resembling a 'normal' wedding. We made plans to record the ceremony so that those who weren't able to make it wouldn't miss out entirely, and we are still hoping to have a first anniversary party with everyone who wasn't able to come on the day!

Suffice to say, planning a COVID-secure wedding in six weeks was pretty stressful. Our evenings and weekends were busy planning the service, designing and printing last-minute invites, organising a seating plan for the church and reception, collecting details for 'track and trace', going to dress and suit fittings, contacting suppliers (some of which we hadn't booked yet!), ordering decorations, making wedding favours...the list goes on! Adrian was absolutely wonderful throughout the entire process, going above and beyond to make sure that we had the best day possible, and ensuring that all of our guests would feel safe and secure on the day.

We wanted to make sure that none of the guests who were able to make it to the ceremony would miss out on the reception, so we decided to split it into two parts. Our immediate and extended family came to the venue for a sit-down meal, and once they had left our friends arrived for an evening celebration. Restrictions meant that we weren't allowed a dance floor, so we provided some entertainment in the form of a pub quiz!

Whilst it would have been wonderful to have everyone there for the whole day, splitting the reception up actually worked really well! Not only did it mean that we were able to have all of our guests, it also meant we were able to spend some quality time with everyone who came.

We are so, so happy that we decided to go ahead and get married, even if it wasn't what we originally had in mind. In some ways, getting married in a pandemic made it even more special. It gave us an opportunity to see friends and family that we hadn't been able to see all year, giving us memories to cherish forever. It also forced us to let go of all the societal expectations of a wedding and focus on the real reason behind 'the big day', for us to become husband and wife. We trusted in God to make a path for us and He gave us more than we could ever have hoped for – and we wouldn't change any of it.



Approaching the Throne – the Gift of Prayer

Anna Bolt reflects on her experience of joining our online Prayer Group during the Covid pandemic.

Psalm 5:1-3

*Listen to my words, Lord,
consider my lament.*

*Hear my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.*

*In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.*

In a time before Covid, Adrian opened the doors of the vicarage early every Monday morning to anyone who was up and ready to start the week with God. Breakfast was provided, followed by a time of sharing the Word and a time of prayer. Unfortunately, I couldn't be there very often as I work on a Monday morning (actually I work every week-day!), and more often than not, prayer group would take a break during the school holidays, my only real chance to be there.

The pandemic changed our world beyond all imagination, but within the chaos there have been endless blessings. In amongst the angst, there was a sense of peace and the rainbow was revived as a symbol of hope in every window. For me, this lockdown way of living has strengthened my faith, and one of the reasons for this was that suddenly prayer breakfast became prayer supper and as I don't have to work on a Tuesday evening I could be there!

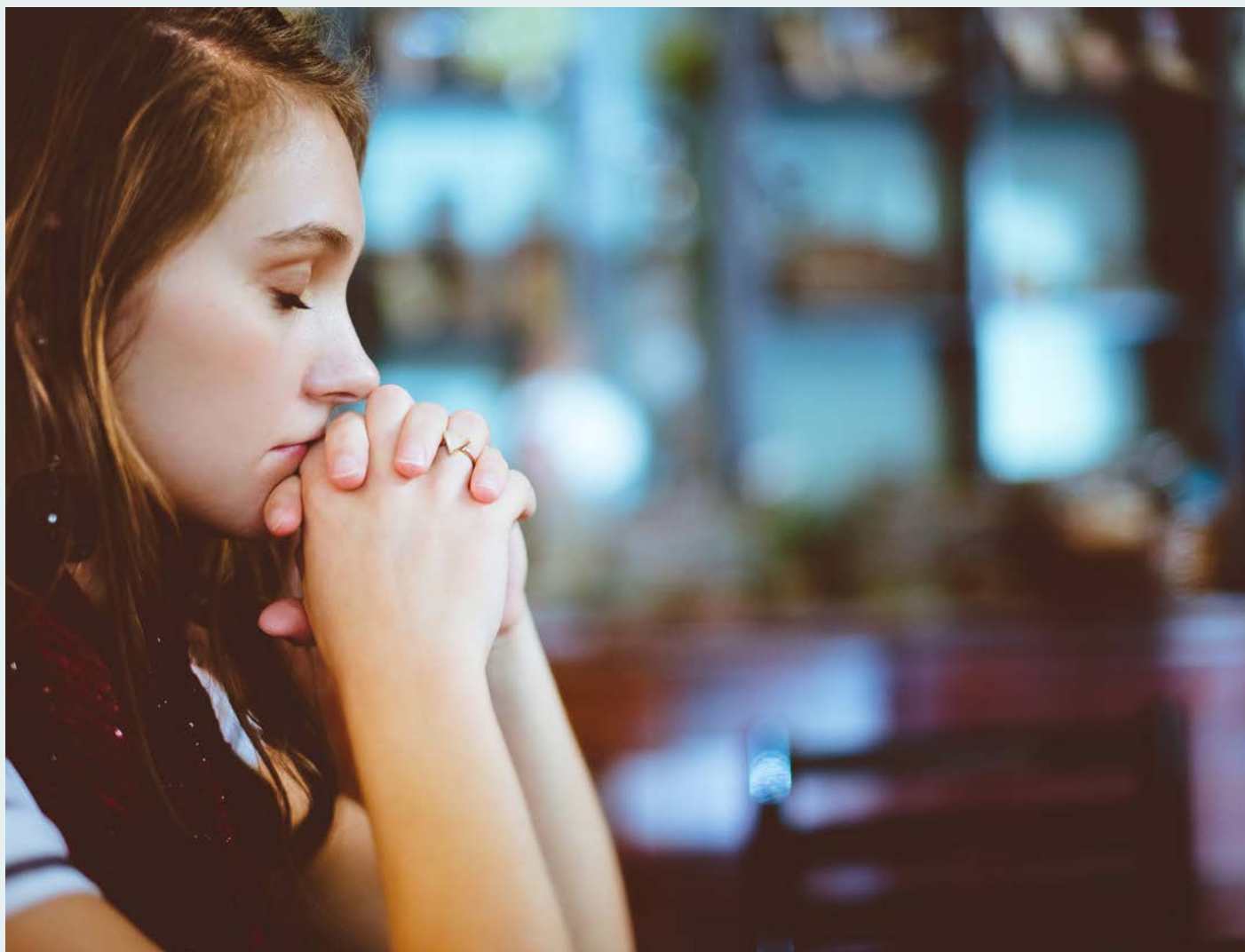
There's no mystery to those Tuesday evenings. We met on Zoom, and got better at that as time went on. We got to see the faces of the people we were missing, and those of people we've never met. The numbers grew, and we often had well over twenty faces on-screen. There was warmth, and comfort and a united sense of need and purpose. We shared our lives with each other, and we laid our prayers before God. We grew.

The group had been blessed for some time by the messages brought by Karen Davies, committed to sharing God's word for us all to ponder and apply.

Her commitment was unwavering but also brought a new challenge for more of us to spend time waiting on the Lord for a word to bring, and as time went on, an ever-growing group of writers emerged, nervously but faithfully sharing what was on our hearts to pray about together. As the weeks turned into months, those Tuesday evenings became a powerful time of true communication with God, a time which often had no definitive end, in which the Spirit was tangible, and in which we grew to feel comfortable with the silences in which we brought the private prayers of our heart. And, prayer was answered. We learned the power of prayer and we came to rely on it above ourselves.

During one of the sessions, I reflected on prayer before we prayed, on the wonder that it is. I spoke about our Queen. As I write, she has buried her husband of seventy-three years. I watched the service with a lump in my throat, and couldn't stop my tears when the camera panned to Her Majesty in her grief. What will stay with me always will be the image of Queen Elizabeth, head bowed and eyes closed in prayer. The most powerful of women, in supplication, as she has been for her entire reign – knowing that prayer is what matters and what makes the difference in every situation. If you watched the Netflix series, *The Crown*, as avidly as I did, you will have seen scenes where the Queen kneels at her bedside at night. It is a fascinating picture of a Queen bowing to *the King*. We have direct access to the same God that our Queen has direct access to, even though we don't have that same access to her.

I met the Queen once, actually up close, and had a very short conversation with her. She asked the questions and I answered. I was with my Dad, who was collecting an Honour and I was there as his interpreter. It was quite an experience but approaching the royal throne was a long and arduous ordeal. There were all sorts of forms to fill in before the big day. Oh, and you have to keep it secret for months. On arrival at the castle there were security



checks and on entry you have to leave your handbag and phone behind. Then there were instructions and lessons – how to approach, how close to get, what to say, what not to say, how to address her, how long to stay and how to leave. Then you join the line and wend your way through the castle rooms until you get to the inner sanctuary and finally approach the throne.

It is so very different with a King who has given us the amazing gift of prayer. Perhaps it is all too easy to miss the extraordinariness of this connection. Imagine what it would feel like if the Queen turned up on your doorstep and said, ‘I’ve just popped by because I thought you might like to talk.’ We have direct access to the King of Kings not just at any time but at all times. ... and more than that, He doesn’t just hear, He responds – it is a conversation, not a one-way street. More still, there is no pomp and ceremony, no security, standing between Him and us.

Being part of a regular prayer group during a new and unprecedented season taught me so much about

my relationship with God. He says, ‘Pray’, in the Spirit (Ephesians 6), ask and keep on asking but that the asking should be honest and pure, a simple communication will always be enough (Matthew chapter 6:5-8). We may be nervous about prayer but, like anything else, we can learn to pray and *how* we learn is easy. First, just pray. Unlike learning how to approach the Queen, we can learn through practice in the presence of Christ! *He* doesn’t expect you to be word perfect and doesn’t mind you getting the pronunciation wrong. He just wants you to be authentic and let it come from the heart to Him, straight to Him, with focus, our full attention and time, humbled by His presence.

Praying doesn’t have to be aloud. God knows us inside out. But praying together invites the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthens our belief in the power of prayer and praying together turns the prayer towards God’s purpose.

I’ve learned that when we take our requests to God in prayer we *can* know He will answer. We won’t

always see or hear or understand the answer but sometimes just that hope and peace you feel in your heart might be the answer – the answer might be ‘I’m here’, ‘Just trust me’, ‘Be patient’. Is the answer ‘not now *but* then’ or even ‘not now *because*’. Perhaps there are times when prayer is answered but we want him to do what we think is the right thing. We won’t always get what we want because it isn’t right for us.

God already knows what he wants us to pray about and when we ask with the right motives (James 4) He will take it and answer in His time and way. If we don’t ask He won’t have anything to answer. Jesus’ mother asked Him to sort out the problem with the lack of wine at a wedding and He took this opportunity and turned it into a miracle, written down forever in the annals of history. Who knows what our prayers can accomplish with God. We have to figure out *what* to pray for and we need to pray about the figuring out. Sometimes we have to ask a different question, pray a different prayer. He’s an amazing God who takes your tiny little request and uses it to do things we can’t even dream. Sometimes, the waiting is frustrating but the results are often more than we’ve imagined – relief from pain, a miracle baby, a changing world in need of Jesus more than ever, gifts of the Spirit, mission doors opening – all worth the wait.

We’ve worked on doing that in prayer group and small group meetings and we have been overwhelmed with the response. We’ve experienced an outpouring of the Spirit in answer. We’ve given thanks for the good and the bad and been brought to our knees.

It doesn’t matter what the question is, the answer is always prayer. Alone, together, with, for, silently, aloud. The answer is always prayer. Between us all, we could probably list hundreds of prayers we’ve

seen answered during the last year. I certainly have a hefty list. And for those prayers yet to be answered, I’ve learned to trust, be patient, to continue to pray and to keep approaching that throne.

When we arrive at the gates to Buckingham Palace or the doors to Windsor Castle, they are locked against us. Armed guards patrol and hover on the rooftops above us. We can’t even get close enough to knock. But Jesus says,

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks

finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Matthew 7), and, in

the knocking we acknowledge the relationship we have with Him and know that the love He has for us opens the door to Him. He gave us Jesus. That’s surely the answer to all prayer.

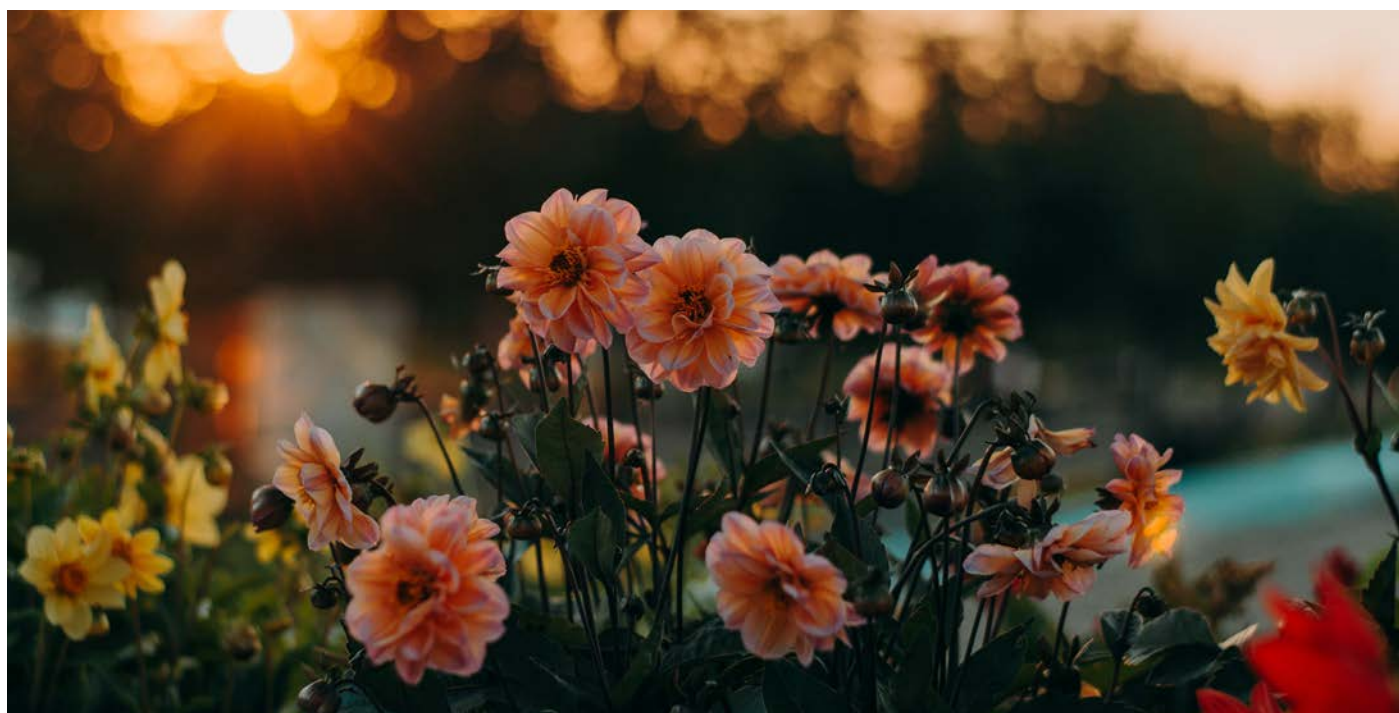
There’s no fence to climb, no window to break, no security guards and no endless corridors to trek to find the King of Kings. And when you knock that door and it opens, we not only have direct access to the Kingdom of Heaven, we have the keys, and God is always going to be there ready to listen, and with all the answers. I can’t imagine

what life would have been like without access to the miracle of technology that gave us access to each other in a group committed to prayer. I thank God for giving me that time, but I marvel at the access to that throne, that He is there at all times, pandemic or no pandemic, Zoom or no Zoom, no veil to separate us from His love. Come and join us. We’d love to see you there.

*In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly. Psalm 5:3*



In memoriam



Betty Thomas (1923-2020)

Muriel Betty Thomas was born on 4 January 1923 and passed away less than three months after her 97th Birthday.

Betty is survived by her two sons — Roger and Peter; three grandchildren — Jonathan, Gemma and Laura; and four great grandchildren — Skye, Jessica, Caitlin and Kobi. They will miss the love and sunshine she brought into their life. Sadly Meurig, her loving husband died ten years ago ending sixty seven years of a happy marriage, highlighted by a telegram from the Queen to celebrate their Diamond Wedding Anniversary.

Betty and Meurig lived their entire lives in Gorseinon and were active members of St Catherine's Church, involving themselves in many Church activities including all the musicals staged in the Church Hall. Betty was a member of the Mothers' Union for fifty three years, served in the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) delivering Meals on Wheels to the poor and disabled of Gorseinon and worked on the Hospital Trolley in the days before there were shops in hospitals.

Betty was also a devoted and respected member of the Townswomen's Guild, who was elected lifelong President until her death.

Some years ago, with the help of constant support from Roger and his wife Pat, Betty moved into the Llys Y Werin independent living complex when she left the family home in Frampton Road, where she had lived since she was two years old. She will be sorely missed by her caring friends and staff there, as well as her many friends and relations across the world.

Bill Powell (1941-2020)

Bill was born in Dromore, Northern Ireland on 6 November 1941 after his mum, Alice, met his Dad, Ray, who was stationed there during the war. Alice and Bill later followed Ray around England where he was stationed and when Ray went to Europe, Alice and Bill came to live in Gowerton with Ray's parents.

After the war, Ray worked for Captain Leighton Davies, owner of Gowerton Steel Works, and the family moved to live in a bungalow built for them on the family estate at Fairwood in the Gower.



The young Bill attended Park Mill School and Penclawdd Secondary Modern.

Initially, Bill was going to make farming his career and prior to attending agricultural college he went to live and work on a farm in Llansteffan, which remained one of his favourite places, although he later decided that farming was not for him. Bill's final choice of career was retail, starting in a mobile van and ending up as a company director, owning a chain of three shops and the highlight of that career was owning Powell Hardware in Kingsbridge, where Zoe always said that he couldn't wait to wake up in the morning to go to work.

He met Zoe on 8 January 1961 and proposed to her on 14 February the same year. The couple later married on 13 July 1963, two days after Zoe turned nineteen. Karen, his beloved daughter, was later born in January 1971. When Karen married Barry in October 1997, he enjoyed being able to welcome his son-in-law into the family, and when his granddaughter, Maddy, came along his joy was complete.

Bill joined the City of Swansea Pipe Band as a drummer, an association that he kept up with for the whole of his life. When his Parkinson's took hold he had to give up playing but he still participated in many events.

Bill was a loving, kind, generous man in his public life and in his private, family life. Despite suffering from worsening health, he never complained. When asked how he was feeling, his standard reply was, 'I'm fine.'

He had what some might call a terrible sense of humour, and maybe they were right! But more than anything he was a man of simple, but great faith. He always used to tell Zoe, his wife, that he was not afraid of dying and that he saw his life as having had a ball!

Eleanor Davies (1937-2020)

Eleanor was born in 1937 in Belfast, just before the outbreak of the second world war. After war broke out she, and her brother and sister, were evacuated to the Giant's Causeway in the North of Ireland for the duration of the war. They were separated from their parents and put on a train with a name tag around their necks, to be picked up by their new guardians. Eleanor was three years of age.

After the war Eleanor enjoyed a loving childhood, but there was also sadness due to the early death of her father and younger brother from Tuberculosis. This resulted in her mother taking in lodgers to make ends meet and Eleanor leaving school at the age of fourteen to earn some money for the family.

However, her mother taking in lodgers proved to be a pivotal point in Eleanor's life. At the age of nineteen, her future husband, Lyn, who was then serving in the Royal Navy, came to lodge in their house. After a whirlwind romance they were married in Belfast within days of him proposing to her.

So, despite never having travelled from Northern Ireland before, she left her family and friends and went with the man she loved to Gorseinon and then to Portsmouth and Plymouth, whilst he served out his time in the Royal Navy.

They eventually settled back in Gorseinon where their sons, Michael and Martin, were born. They both remember Eleanor being a loving, caring and hard working mother, knitting and sewing to make some extra money whilst doing the extremely challenging job of looking after the boys. Various other part time jobs followed before eventually becoming the Canteen Manageress in the Bryngwyn Steel Works in Gorseinon, and the boys vividly remember looking forward to Friday nights when any left over fish, chips, Dan Hansen pies and rice pudding were brought home.

Eleanor always got involved in any activities that the boys were involved in. They both joined cub scouts and, sure enough, she was there helping out. In those days the leaders were named after

characters from *The Jungle Book* and Eleanor was 'Baloo the Bear'. They have happy memories of their mother on camps leading pony trekking expeditions or zooming down a zip wire and diving into a lake. Never afraid to have a go, indeed, normally the first to volunteer.

When the boys left home, both Eleanor and Lyn enjoyed more freedom and went on many holidays and adventures together. As well as trips to America and China, particular favourites were holidays in Turkey, the Lake District and Ireland. In fact, Lyn kept a diary of all their Lake District hiking holidays and the boys were amazed to read how much walking and climbing they did, often up to ten miles a day in all weathers.

As well as these holidays, when the Grandchildren were born they were both as supporting and loving grandparents as they were parents. They loved all the Grandchildren and were always ready to help out where they could.

After fifty years of happy marriage Lyn passed away at the age of seventy and although Eleanor carried on bravely, she never really got over it. However, she did not complain and found great comfort with her family and her new friends at St Catherine's Church. Indeed, her faith was a great comfort to her in her later years as her health began to fail.

Ron Parry (1931-2021)

Ron was born on 10 May 1931, a son to Idwal and Violet Parry. He attended school in Casllwchwr before going to Gowerton Boys Grammar School and then completing his National Service with the RAF, serving as a Corporal in Germany and working in the Barracks Post Office.

After returning home, Ron completed his teachers training qualifications at Trinity College in Carmarthen, where he attended the college



chapel and developed a love of Compline. Later, upon completion of his training, he began his teaching career in Essex before coming back to Swansea to work in Killay and then at the Secondary Modern later in Tre Uchaf.

After completing his Open University Degree, Ron joined the School Psychological Service, where he would be responsible for assessing children with Special Educational Needs, making diagnoses and putting special teaching programmes in place.

Ron and Ruby had grown up together and were involved in the life of the Church together, but it was when he came back from Essex that a romance began to blossom between them. She had come to his house for tea and he always insisted that God had prompted him to ask for her hand in marriage. They did much of their courting in the Mumbles before eventually getting married on 10 August 1963 at St Michael's Church in Loughor.

In July 1969, Ron and Ruby moved to Belgrave Close where Ron would live for the rest of his life. They had their first daughter, Ellen in 1967, followed by Norma in 1968. In the fullness of time, Ron became a proud and loving Grampa to Tom, and he was his biggest fan.

The family spent as much time in St Michael's as they did at home, where Ron was instrumental in the Sunday School, where he served as choirmaster, and Church Warden for more than fourteen years. Later he was a Lay Reader too and often took services in churches across the Deanery.

When the parishes of Gorseinon and Loughor merged, Ron embraced the change wholeheartedly — recognising the need to move forward and look to the future — and he soon became well known and much loved at St Catherine's too. Ron played a massive, key part in the life of the parish, and was well loved and very well respected, which is no doubt why he would always be affectionally referred to in church, not by his Christian name, but as Mr Parry! He will be sadly missed, but we rejoice in his resurrection, reunited again with his beloved wife, Ruby.

The Road to Readership

Elizabeth Williams, our Licensed Lay Minister, reflects on her vocational journey so far, her training and role as a Reader in the parish.

After the death of my husband, I became more involved in church activities. I've always gone to church, and became a bell ringer at St Catherine's in my teens when living in Gorseinon, but moved to Loughor and then attended St. Michael's Church with my husband and continued to do so after he died.

When the Vicar, Ian Drew-Jones, asked for volunteers to become Worship Leaders – a fairly new venture in our local churches and I got involved in that. I had read scripture passages and intercessions on Sundays, but I felt more involved when I was writing a reflection on what I had got from the scripture reading – what it had said to me personally and researching what others said about it. Comments from some of the congregation were encouraging – as a member of their congregation myself, I felt it brought us into an informal discussion in a different way from conventional services.

I soon felt called to do more and get more involved – but I wasn't sure what. The Vicar suggested becoming a Reader or LLM (Licensed Lay Minister). This required studying the Theology for Life Courses (which can lead to a degree). I really enjoyed this – learning about the scriptures in more depth, from the Old Testament and the history of Christianity, Christian worship and also, various aspects of how it is practised in modern society.

It involved meeting once a week in St Mary's Church, Swansea and later in St Catherine's in Gorseinon. We discussed different topics and wrote essays about them which were assessed (no tests or exams, thank goodness!). We used course books which 'talked' about the Old and New Testaments, and other aspects of church and society, its history and its place in today's society. I used the word 'talked' because it was written as if someone was telling you about the scriptures and their relevance in the world today, not at all stuffy.

I had to go through some interviews, along with a few others at a Retreat House. This, I must admit, we all found rather gruelling — but making new friends



from all backgrounds, some aiming to become clergy and others Readers, and training together was inspiring and I enjoyed learning about where they came from and their different challenges. We went to a residential summer school in the beginning and then on residential weekends. We still attend these as ongoing training, but during the pandemic they moved online.

Now as a licensed Reader, through my training, I can assist the Vicar, by playing a part in parish life, assisting with pastoral care, in services and even preaching, but I still feel connected to the congregation too – feeling part of a team.

I enjoy what I do, putting what has inspired me into words and sharing it with others – and hopefully seeing if it makes them as excited as me. I felt a calling but just before I went for the interview, I had doubts: I remember standing on the beach beside Loughor Bridge wondering if I was doing the right thing. I watched the current's fast flow as the tide came in. I could hear someone telling me (in my head of course), 'You must go with that flow,' and I am sure I felt a gentle push.

I did what I was told. I smile when I think of it now. I know who spoke to me, and who pushed me, telling me the calling was real. I hope I can live up to it!

Glynne's life of service is recognised in New Year's Honours list

Reflecting on his recent honour in the Queen's New Year's Honours List, Reverend Glynne James, a curate at St Catherine's for more than three decades, insisted that he 'was absolutely speechless and felt very humbled.'

"I couldn't believe it and I was very touched that people had nominated me," Glynne said as he reflected on the news that he was to be awarded a British Empire Medal by the Queen.

Many people would not be surprised by the way that Glynne responded to the news about his award, given for his service to police chaplaincy, the community of Gorseinon and to the country, as it is in keeping with the way he has lived his life during sixty-three years of public service.

The British Empire Medal has the words 'God and Empire' engraved upon it and Glynne insists that the honour was not so much his, but for God, Queen and Country. He wanted it to reflect not upon him, but be "to the glory of God through our Lord Jesus Christ," he said.

Responding to the news of Glynne's honour, the Archbishop of Wales, the Most Reverend John Davies said that he was "absolutely delighted to be told confidentially by Glynne that he was to receive this honour, and I can now openly congratulate him."

"He has, interwoven his faith, his ordained ministry and his secular roles in such a way as to emphasise that faith is not to be compartmentalised, but should infuse all aspects of life, and run through it like a golden thread. That his careful and prayerful support of so many others in so many ways has been recognised in this very public way is richly deserved," Archbishop John said.

One of four children, Glynne was born in Pembrokeshire in 1939, where he attended the local Narbeth Church School and Narbeth Grammar School. Both would have a big influence on his faith,



as would his parents who regularly attended the local Church in the Parish of Lampeter Velfrey.

Glynne left school having gained good qualifications and worked for Costain John Brown, acquiring a sound knowledge of electrical engineering principles. But at the age of eighteen he was drafted into the Armed Forces and joined the Fleet Air Arm, or 'the airey fairies' as they were amusingly called. He served in the Arctic, Middle East and Far East and enjoyed it.

"I'd set my heart on a career in the police, but I was also interested in electrical and mechanical engineering," Glynne explained.

"I wanted to learn a trade and travel the world



before I settled down into the police, and I had both as well as a wage in the Fleet Air Arm,” he said.

“It was an amazing experience! You had to put up with the uncompromising discipline that prevailed during that time, as well as witness much hardship and poverty that existed in that part of the world.”

He first met Beryl when he was twenty-one, on Rogation Sunday in June 1960. She was with a group of young farmers blessing the fields at Carew Church and they both have a good recollection of that Summer’s day when they first met.

They were married at the Church where Beryl was organist in 1967 and soon moved to Killay as Glynne had joined the Swansea Borough Police Force in 1964.

Reflecting on their life together, Glynne insists that Beryl has been his strength and support throughout their time together, and he is grateful that they have been blessed with son, Christopher, and a daughter-in-law, Helen. Their three grandchildren, Thomas, Grace and Theo, now live in Swansea with their parents and they are all a huge blessing to Glynne and Beryl.

Having applied for the police while he was still in the Armed Forces, Glynne flew home to Wales as soon as a vacancy in Swansea became available and he soon settled into life as a police officer, first serving as a constable on the streets of Swansea, then

progressing through the ranks to Inspector.

It was during his time as a police officer that Glynne first began to experience a calling to the priesthood.

“I set out in life to be a career police officer with no thought whatsoever of becoming a priest. When I did have a calling I questioned it for many years, putting forward all sorts of reasons in my mind why I was not the right person for the priesthood,” Glynne explained.

But despite his best efforts to avoid ordination, God had other plans for Glynne and, after considerable prayer and reflection, he decided to explore the possibility of ordination in 1984.

“When I was interviewed by Bishop Vaughan, I told him that I had avoided putting myself forward for about fifteen years,” Glynne said.

“Much to my amazement though, the Bishop looked at me and said, “That’s good news.” No doubt because he knew that the best Priests are not those who think that they are able and ready to do God’s work, but rather, understanding the enormity and impossibility of the task, they are the reluctant candidates who know that their job can only be done well in God’s strength and not in their own.

The following year, Glynne was ordained and a year later became a Self Supporting Curate at St Catherine’s Church, a position he still holds today, and during those thirty-five years he has served five different Vicars, carrying out the full duties of a Parish priest during four lengthy interregnums. Glynne is an amazing, calming presence in the Church and manages to carry out his work with grace, humility and a sense of humour, all skills gained from his life experiences.

The current Vicar, Rev Dr Adrian Morgan paid tribute to Glynne saying that he was ‘absolutely delighted to hear that Glynne had been awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen’s New Year Honours List.’

“Glynne is a true gentleman and his service to others is driven by his deep Christian faith, which is evident to all who know him,” Adrian said.

“On a personal note, I have always valued his friendship and his quiet, committed support. I’m sure that you’ll agree with me that this recognition is

well deserved and long overdue. We love Glynne deeply and we wish him every blessing.”

In 1995, the ground-breaking news of Glynne’s appointment as the first ever Chaplain to the Welsh Police Force was announced.

“Being a Chaplain gives one a deep and fascinating insight into the most unique public body in the United Kingdom. It’s a behind the scenes view of how men and women, from all walks of life, cope with a complex, demanding, daunting and dangerous role, which can be both stressful and dehumanising.”

“Policing is a harsh and confrontational occupation, which has a profound effect on police officers and staff. As a Chaplain you may have referrals from people of all faiths or none — and be faced with a whole range of complex issues — but in dealing with them, it’s the Chaplain’s role to listen, be impartial and not make judgments.”

Since Glynne’s own ground-breaking appointment, more than twenty-six years ago, he has worked tirelessly to recruit more faith chaplains for the Welsh Police force, working hard to ensure that the team reflected the diversity of the twenty-first century Welsh landscape and in recognition of this, he received a Heart of Gold award.

Bestowing the award upon him, a senior police commander insisted that Glynne’s “passion for supporting staff of all faiths, as well of those of none — and to providing a service that is reflective of our communities — led Glynne to successfully recruit a further thirteen ecumenical chaplains from multiple faiths, significantly improving the diversity of police chaplaincy in South Wales and standing as a beacon for other forces to emulate.”

At the age of eighty-one years young, Glynne shows no signs of slowing down, retaining responsibility for the recruitment, retention and advice to his team of police chaplains, providing pastoral care to officers and staff and tending the flock in St Catherine’s Church.





The power of worldwide lockdown to open up somebody's world

When a chronic health condition made staying at home an every-day occurrence for Karen Shadrach, she thought that a global health crisis that kept everyone else at home too would change very little. But as the rest of society adjusted to a 'new normal' indoors, Karen is grateful for unforeseen blessings this has brought her.

It was a different story fifteen years ago, when Karen began attending St Catherine's Church. She enjoyed getting stuck in and played a full part in church life.

"I was on the Parochial Church Council — even serving as Secretary for a season — and I joined the Evening Mothers' Union, helping to run the group for a number of years," Karen explained.

"I also enjoyed being a member of the Living Faith

group, the Cursillo group and attending Bible Study too, but my deteriorating health has meant that I'm no longer able to attend church on a Sunday."

Karen suffers from a disability called Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, a genetic condition, (as well as a few other conditions thrown in for good measure!) which has got worse, over the last few years.

"My last attended Sunday service was in October 2017, just after my twentieth wedding anniversary,

but around a year later, I felt able to attend the Wednesday morning services. That was a great help to me, as it was a much shorter service and no one could dispute that the chairs we sat on in the Lady Chapel are much comfier than the wooden pews! I love the Wednesday bunch immensely, but I still miss the main Sunday services and the sense of fellowship that it brought me.”

Due to her health conditions, Karen had been used to long, enforced periods at home, but when the National Lockdown was announced in March last year things soon changed radically even for her.

“Fast forward to March 2020 and I had to get used to my husband, Barry, working from home and my daughter, Maddy, studying for online exams, having come home from university.”

Due to her underlying health conditions, Karen felt unable to risk going out so depended entirely on Barry and Maddy, to do the shopping and to keep an eye on her mum, Zoe.

“I didn’t cross my doorstep from 23 March until the 8 May, when we had a socially distanced party to celebrate VE day in our front garden,” Karen said.

“But in reality, lockdown threatened to change very little of my every day life, as I am not one for leaving the house for prolonged periods due to my disability.”

If anything has changed, it’s changed for the better for Karen, because the enforced Covid restrictions have helped wider society to experience something that is the norm for people who find themselves housebound due to health issues. Also, because everyone has had to find new ways of communicating via online platforms over the last year, Karen now feels more connected to many of her friends and church family members than she has done for many years.

“I had never heard of Zoom until Adrian, the vicar emailed about getting together online, and I remember logging on, seeing people, and thinking ‘this is amazing!’” Karen said.

“I started attending the Tuesday evening prayer meeting, the Bible study on a Wednesday and the virtual Coffee Morning on a Thursday and I felt more connected to our church than I had for years! The technology was so accessible and easy to use, meaning that my world opened up and bloomed, far more than it has for a considerable time.”

This last year has, in many ways, been a challenge for Karen as her dad, Bill Powell, passed away in March, immediately before the realities of the pandemic began to reach the United Kingdom; her mum, Zoe, has been in and out of hospital; and her husband, Barry, was involved in a car accident in October. But being able to connect with her church family virtually and on a daily basis has brought comfort and strength in tough times.

“I can’t tell you how much my quality of life has improved since I’ve been able to connect virtually and although I’m longing to be able to meet people again, I’m also really hoping that a virtual presence will be maintained after we enter into the ‘new normal’. I’m so grateful for having access to my church family through these times, it has truly been invaluable,” Karen shared.

“Zoom has undoubtedly changed my life, though lockdown has been difficult and nightmarish for many, it has really brought access to the forefront of people’s minds and has undeniably shown that it is possible to cater to and include the disabled community if people set their minds to it.”

One example of this has been through the development of a second ‘Connect’ group within St Catherine’s church, where eight people who didn’t really know each other before lockdown now log into Zoom each week to share life, discuss their faith and pray for each other. What’s incredible about this, is that Karen is not only a member of the group, but co-leader with Emma Davies, another lady who joined St Catherine’s during lockdown. They have never actually met in person currently, but became friends via one of St Catherine’s weekly Zoom meetings, and together, felt prompted by God to start the Connect group. The group has been running for over six months now, and they are currently reading this edition’s Recommended Read, ‘Too busy not to pray’ together. Whilst there are definite plans for this group to continue meeting online even after lockdown restrictions are over, the group are also looking forward to the day when they can meet together in one household, and celebrate with a barbecue!

Karen says that ‘the setting up of our Connect group has certainly put the cherry on the cake, I am so pleased to say I have gained another little family through it. I have truly been blessed by Zoom during lockdown.’

Lockdown didn't limit our incredible Mothers' Union

Last year started so well! Plans had been made, we held our usual meetings, enjoying excellent speakers, and looked forward to the Deanery and Diocesan Festivals and all the other events which form the framework of a normal year. All we had to complain about was the weather! Then, much of what was familiar and seemingly certain was swept away in the path of the Coronavirus and most of us found ourselves living in relative isolation. We could never have imagined that our lives would still be so very different one year on.

However, Mothers' Union doesn't stop because of difficult circumstances — that is when it is most needed. As a Branch, and individual members, we responded to an early appeal from our headquarters, Mary Sumner House, to enable the organisation to continue to function and to provide support where it is most needed, both at home and abroad.

Additional funding was also provided to support the Diocesan projects, including provisions for the four Safe Houses, sadly needed more than ever this year. Craft materials were also purchased for Faith in Families, to be delivered to the homes of children unable to visit the Centres and take part in the activities which they normally enjoy and which contribute so much to their development and well-being.

Our members who knit squares for the Wakisa Ministries in Kampala, which care for young mothers-to-be who have no family support, have put their enforced seclusion to good use and have been more productive than ever! Eight parcels of knitted squares were sent off during the past year, at a cost of over £100, most of which was covered

by generous donations from members. As soon as a new Dormitory Block was completed in October girls were able to move in and have been sewing the colourful squares together to make blankets for their babies and covers for their own beds. A new Administration block is still under construction, also a Training & Education block, and it is hoped to build a new Health & Maternity block when funds allow. All of these developments enhance the care of very vulnerable young women at a critical time in their lives, showing the love of God through practical and spiritual support.

Closer to home, as a Branch we have continued to support the nine young people living in Llys Awen, Gorseinon. At the end of March 2020, we delivered Easter eggs and a card for each resident and, at Christmas, each young person received a tin of Celebration chocolates and a card. A special request had been made for further copies of the MU Easy Eats booklet which the young people have found most helpful as they learn how to live independently after leaving the care system. Regular deliveries have also been made throughout the year of non-perishable foodstuffs and toiletries for their communal store-cupboard and, thanks to the generosity of members, a further delivery of goods (and Easter eggs!) is about to be made.

Members have supported Baby Basics for many years and have continued to do so this year. In December, four new mattresses were provided for the Moses baskets which hold the Starter Sets given to young mums who are in need of support. Members have also donated toiletries needed by both mothers and new babies.



On a Branch and personal level, we have so missed our regular meetings and being able to see each other face-to-face. However, members have kept in touch by various means — telephone, email, Zoom, MU News (you name it, we've done it!). We have also celebrated some things together, although physically apart. At 3.00pm on 1st December, each in our own home, we used the service sheet which had been provided for our customary Carol Service, and followed that with a cup of tea and cake of our choice — not quite the same as the lavish spread we normally enjoy in the Hall, but it led us into the Christmas season, nonetheless. More recently, we were grateful to Adrian for enabling us to mark the Wave of Prayer by filming our contribution and incorporating it into the morning service on 21 February, with Mothers' Union members using this to observe our allocated time of 12.00 noon to

12.45pm, maintaining our place in this world-wide wave.

Sadly, during 2020, three of our members passed away: Betty Thomas, Mair Dudley and Eleanor Davies (EMU) were faithful members of our Branch and will be greatly missed and remembered with affection.

There were also individual celebrations of special birthdays, with good wishes sent from a safe distance!

Despite all the restrictions and difficulties, we continue to be the Mothers' Union here in the Parish of Casllwchwr and Gorseinon, bound by a common purpose and friendship. We are as strong as ever — perhaps even stronger — and look forward to the day when we can all come together for our afternoon and evening meetings.



Keep Praying and Believing



“Keep on asking and it will be given you.” (Matthew 7.7)

Observe three things:

1. *Jesus never said that following Him would be easy.* ‘In the world you will have tribulation.’ (John 16.33) So when you attempt great things for God, accept difficulties — and delays. When construction crews work on a road, they often put up a sign: ‘Expect delays.’ The walk of faith is littered with these signs. Abraham and Sarah waited twenty-five years for Isaac to be born, so why do you think your answers should be instant?

2. *You must persevere to receive.* Waiting is an uncomfortable concept for us. We’re used to

having everything ‘on demand.’

If someone tells us to wait, we find an app on our phone and speed up the process. But there’s no shortcut when it comes to perseverance. Sometimes faith is painful because God is stretching your capacity to receive. So press through the pain — there’s gain on the other side! ‘Keep on asking and it will be given you.’

3. *The end result of faith is larger territory.* Twice after Isaac dug a well, the Philistines laid claim to the water. But when he dug a third time, the conflict stopped, and he named the new well Rehoboth,

which means ‘a broad place’ (see Genesis 26.18-22). Isaac kept on digging, and when the breakthrough came, he declared, ‘At last the Lord has made room for us, and we will be faithful in the land (v. 22). And the lesson Isaac learned is still part of our faith curriculum. We must stretch our faith when there’s no stretch left, and we must pray beyond delay.

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Large grants help break new ground in lockdown

Whilst the national lockdown has meant that many things have stopped for a season, we have certainly not stood still.

“It’s a standing joke that the clergy only work on a Sunday,’ explained the Vicar, Adrian Morgan.

“So while the church was closed, the clergy must be sitting around doing nothing? Not likely! New challenges simply meant that we had to quickly evolve and find new ways of doing things! Standing still and doing nothing just wasn’t an option,” explained Adrian.

Whilst we have not always been able to worship in person during the last year, it was thought to be essential that we continue to worship regularly, so work began to find alternative ways of meeting together.

“We began by putting together a weekly podcast, but if truth be told, none of us had ever done anything like this before so it was a very steep learning curve.”

“This was released from the word go, and continued to appear every week, even when the easing of restrictions meant that we were able to worship in person. It was obvious that people were anxious about venturing out — many continue to be — so having a regular online alternative was essential.”

Soon, though, people began to share that although they enjoyed the podcasts, they missed seeing people’s faces. So no sooner than we could overcome our camera shyness, we were venturing into the world of YouTube and began putting weekly videos together, which have been incredibly well received.

“When restrictions allowed us to do so, we started to record services in the church buildings themselves, but this was not easy because they are hardly packed with technology,” Adrian said.

“I was determined not to see this as an obstacle, but as an opportunity — and soon began to pray for



ways forward that would help to make the process easier.”

Astonishingly, his prayers were answered, because after a little bit of hard work, we were awarded a grant for £3,260 from the Austin Bailey Foundation, for the specific purpose of making some of the necessary improvements.

“That grant enabled us to instal wifi, which meant that we could reliably use computers and access the internet in church and in the hall for the first time, which really began to make a difference.”

The one successful grant application encouraged Adrian to dig deeper and explore other avenues too.

“Anyone who worships regularly at St Catherine’s will know that an upgrade of our sound system is long overdue,” he said.

“So I wondered if there might be some money out there to do just that. I started working on a National Lottery grant application for the specific purpose of making upgrades to our sound and audio visual equipment, and to my amazement we were awarded £10,000!” Adrian explained.

As the pandemic evolved, so too did the normal rhythms of the church.

“In church, we often talk about mission,” Adrian said.

“Good mission isn’t about people having something done to them, it’s about the church waking up to the reality that we follow a God of mission, one that is already at work in the world around us. A God that longs for a relationship with his people.”

“So the key is to be still enough to see what God is already doing in the world around us, and then to join in with that — even when it takes us to places we’ve never been before.”

So when people who were isolating or vulnerable began to share that they were struggling to access vital food supplies — perhaps because they were elderly, living alone, and had no family nearby to support them — it was an absolutely natural step for the church to get involved in setting up a food hub to help local residents, which had distributed more than 1,500 food parcels to local residents by the beginning of October 2020.

“As things developed, we were hearing stories about families struggling. People were losing jobs and incomes, and were unsure how they would be able to feed their families or pay the bills that still had to be paid.”

When the Trusell Trust Food Bank announced then that they would be making £35,000 available to enable schools to provide wholesome, fresh food parcels for some of their most needy and vulnerable families, that seemed like a real answer to prayer, but could there be more?

“When I learned of the Church Revitalisation Trust, and their mission to share the love of God in this season by meeting people’s very real needs — I set out to try and secure match funding.”

“Again, incredibly the grant received favour — so the Food Bank was able to make £70,000 available to make a massive difference, to bring some light into the lives of people who found themselves in real darkness.”

Another application secured a £5,000 grant for the specific purpose of enabling us to send Christmas and Easter boxes, full of seasonal treats, to local families.

“It’s been a really challenging year for people, so we were delighted at Christmas (and now again at Easter) to be able to raise people’s spirits and share the love of Jesus, the reason for the season, with people from across our community by giving them a free gift.”

“Some of the volunteers from the church community who have been helping to deliver these boxes have shared with me how people have been deeply moved to receive them.”

“For me, that free gift is just like the love of Jesus, because no matter who or what we are, what we’ve done or haven’t done, his love for us is a free, unconditional gift — all we have to do is accept it.”

And, as if like icing on the cake, when our Diocese launched a ‘Light in the Darkness’ campaign, encouraging parishes to floodlight their buildings at Christmas as a reminder that the coming of Jesus marked the triumph of life over death and hope over despair (a particularly poignant message in the midst of a pandemic), we were delighted that a local firm were able to light up St Catherine’s at no cost whatsoever to the church, simply because they wanted to encourage the community to hold on to hope in this season.

A staggering total of £53,260 in grants this year has enabled us to make a real difference in our community and to be the hands and feet of Jesus for people at their point of greatest need.

“We may come with ideas — plans and programmes — that we’d like to undertake, but when we simply stop and look at what is going on around us, at what God is already doing, and then find the courage to get stuck in with that, we can be absolutely sure that a blessing to enable the work will follow,” Adrian said.

'Keeping in touch' team turn isolation into connection

Volunteering is one of the things that people have done in bucket loads over this last year of restrictions and lockdowns. When times are tough it seems to bring the best out in us as human beings and that has been no different in the Parish of Casllwchwr & Gorseinon.

A dedicated group of ten church members — baptised our 'keeping in touch' team — has been regularly ringing people whose names are entered on the electoral roll of the Parish for a chat and to provide a point of contact should they need any support, either spiritual or practical.

Most calls have just been an opportunity to hear a friendly voice and share feelings and everyday frustrations with lockdown, but several of the volunteers have also been able to shop for essential food and medicine where housebound church members have been struggling.

As the months have gone by, many of our volunteers have enjoyed the opportunity to strengthen their relationship with old friends, but they've also been encouraged to realise that they have much in common with the people that they've connected with for the first time during lockdown. Whilst they may have been attending the same Church for many years, they may not have exchanged any more than a friendly hello on a Sunday before this lockdown period, which has allowed new friendships to blossom and many

people are now looking forward to meeting up with their new friends as soon as restrictions allow us to embrace the 'new normal.'

The team of callers was co-ordinated by Rob Samuel, who met regularly with the clergy to help ensure effective pastoral care, either by connecting on the telephone, or by dropping a card in the post when significant issues were identified. Aside from that, the clergy have also tried to contact people on significant anniversaries (especially birthdays) and to visit people in the garden when restrictions have allowed.

Naturally, we were concerned that nobody should be forgotten about (and we're sorry if you were!), so we shared Rob's contact details in our weekly services, either online or in person, and encouraged anyone who would benefit from a regular chat with someone else to get in touch.

One of the welcome, unintended consequences of the pandemic (for society as a whole, but also for the church) is a renewed sense of community, neighbours connecting and looking out for each other. Strangers became friends and pastoral care become the responsibility of the community as a whole. We've learned afresh that 'church' isn't a place where we go, but something that we become when, following the example of Jesus, every one of us seeks to look out for and to love the other.



Penny begins new life in Spain



Penny Harries shares her longstanding relationship with children's church and St Catherine's, and what it's been like living in lockdown in Spain, since she emigrated there in Summer 2020.

I started my church journey when I joined the Sunday school in Roker Methodist Church, Sunderland aged three and in a sense I've never left. In 1977, age fourteen I was confirmed and two years later started teaching, alongside three others in the Sunday school I knew so well. Back then we each taught different year groups and I often worked with the eight year olds, although each year we swapped around. I loved reading them bible stories and helping them complete their worksheets, watching their interested faces as they learnt new things about Jesus. This was a constant aspect of my weekly life until I got married, which is how I came to Wales and joined St Catherine's church in 1986.

Whilst I attended Sunday morning services, it was St Catherine's Sunday school I longed for each week, so began taking my eldest daughter, Victoria, then three years old every Sunday morning. I got to know Rob Samuel and Ingrid Richards, local youth

including Rhian Austin, as well as Lynne Longman and Jill Dickie, who ran the creche at the time. Over the next thirty-five years, Sunday school's name changed to Junior church, and most recently to 'Explorers' and I have numerous happy memories from them. These include annual trips to Tenby and eating sandy picnics on the beach, or BBQs where children and adult alike had to fend off greedy seagulls wanting our burgers, and in later years, chips, before we caught the coach home. No matter whether it rained or the sun shone, we all enjoyed and usually managed to get sun burnt by the time we got home.

Good Friday celebrations have always been my favourite time of year with the children. I loved organising hot, vinegary fish and chips, eaten straight out of greasy paper bags, for over fifty of us, after attending the children's service. All ages, old and young would get involved, with both sharing out



the food, and running various activity tables for the children to make Easter based treats, once their bellies were full of chips. Certain crafts stick in my mind now; children made Easter banners, altar cloths made from everyone's hand prints, and one year, even an Easter Robe for the Vicar to wear!

My second favourite time of the year is the Christingle service, where the inside of St Catherine's is lit up by the children's Christingle oranges. This always seemed very calm and peaceful after the chaos and busyness of rehearsing for and performing the annual Sunday school Nativity play. Some plays had significantly more practice than others, but thankfully, were fun to produce and they have always been 'all right on the night!'.

So it was with a heavy heart I had to say goodbye to my church family in St Catherine's when I retired and moved to Spain in July 2020 and had thought my journey with St Catherine's would be ending. I immediately started looking for a new church to attend in Spain, but due to the pandemic, most have been closed or are out of my lockdown area. This could have been a very lonely time, but I have been so pleased to still be able to "attend" St Catherine's

church virtually through online services, and to my surprise and delight, still join children in the weekly online, Zoom 'Explorers' meetings that have been happening since October 2020.

So I may not be in the church building, nor in the UK, but I am currently continuing to worship virtually with St Catherine's from Spain! Explorers has recently been learning about what life was like for Jesus as a child and as he grew up, and interestingly, there are a lot of similarities between this and the way the Spanish rural communities I live in still exist. For example, I have to collect fresh water every week from a man who sells it, as we don't have drinkable piped water here, and donkeys are considered an essential mode of transporting goods!

I hope to visit Wales again at some point when I'm allowed to again, and do hope that over the years, the friends I've made in St Catherine's can come and visit me in Spain too. Even when the online services stop, and the world is able to meet up face to face again, I don't intend for my strong links to St Catherine's to end.

RECOMMENDED READS

Local bookworms share something about the books that have blessed and encouraged their Christian journey

To busy or not too busy to pray during lockdown - that is the question!



The experience of lockdown have been different for everyone, with some having longterm enforced time at home, with endless hours to fill as they choose, and others rushed off their feet as they adapt to working in their changing roles in this new Covid era. Both have their benefits and their difficulties. Whichever group you've found yourself in over the last year, the same question remains; are you too busy in your day to day living to pray to God?

The book addresses this question, and actually argues that if your answer is veering more to the 'yes, I am too busy to pray' side then in actual fact, as the title states, you are actually 'too busy NOT to pray.'

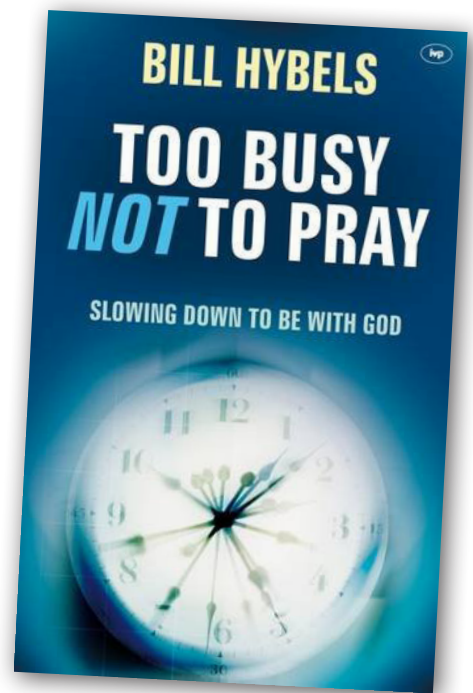
The book, originally published in 1988, with multiple reprints and updates since then indicates it's popularity and helpfulness to numerous people who have felt too busy to pray, and spend quality time with God, or just not known what prayer really

is and how to do it effectively.

I first came across this book in 1999, as a university student and when our Connect group decided that this would be the next book we'd read and discuss together, I happily went to find my original, dusty copy.

If you find prayer an unnatural, awkward activity, you're in safe hands as the book describes '*prayer is an unnatural activity*,' as it moves us from our natural reliance and focus on ourselves, to that of God. Therefore the first three chapters focus on who God is, how he is present during our prayer time, how he wants time with us and what he is able to do through prayer.

Our Connect group has just finished the second section of the book, which has addressed practical aspects of a healthy prayer life, where we have investigated how Jesus prayed, and taught us to



pray via the Lord's prayer, and begun using a helpful pattern to guide the structure of our prayers. It's easy to remember ACTS; adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. We are finding that spending time in adoration for who God is, before being honest and confessing out wrongdoings (sin) makes it easier to then focus on and thank him for individual things in our lives. Importantly, this structure helps us put our own requests (supplication) into the perspective of our eternal, Almighty God, and stops us equating praying to God as only coming to him with our shopping list of what we want him to do for us. I can speak from 22 years experience of using ACTS since I first read this book, that it has really benefited my own prayer life. In our connect group, Karen has found these practical elements very helpful and has recently started using ACTS to structure her own prayers and it's made a big, positive difference to her too.

As a group we are soon moving into the third section of the book, which gently unpicks an incredibly painful area of prayer - the hurt and questions that come when our prayers are unanswered. And whilst unanswered prayer may demotivate us to keep communicating with God, the book also encourages us (and gives us ideas and tips) of how to pay more attention to our prayers that have been answered, which can help keep our prayer life active, regular and vibrant, rather than cooling off over time.

The book concludes with a clear message - all the advice covered so far will not really help our spiritual health unless we can slow down enough to have quality prayer time with God - removing the distractions of the world around us and in the quiet, not only speak to, but wait on and listen to what God wants to speak to you about.

The book has an American flavour to it at times, and some examples given are more middle than working class, but please don't be put off by that. Whilst it was first published in the 1980's I agree with Jayne in our connect group who concludes *'its contents remain relevant for the 21st century and it's an easy read. I am enjoying the book so far as it's provided a*

helpful guide to the art of prayer and provided some useful tools in developing a better prayer life.'

At the end of each chapter are some discussion questions, which you can reflect on individually, but we've found them very useful for enabling interesting discussions in our connect group. So this is a book you can read on your own, or maybe get together with a few friends to read and discuss being too busy NOT to pray together.

Too busy not to pray. Bill Hybels, Intervarsity Press
ISBN number 0-85111-329-X. Multiple editions. Most recent 2011 - from £1.89 second hand, £9.99 new, £0.99 audiobook on Amazon.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SUBMIT A
RECOMMENDED READ REVIEW?

I'm sure that between us we have a wealth of books worth sharing. If you have a book that has helped you in your Christian faith and daily walk with God, and would like it to be considered for review in Vision magazine, get in touch with me by telephoning the Vicarage on (01792) 892849.

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Tonia Antoniazzi MP

Member of Parliament for Gower



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My Constituency office is open for caseworker drop in Sessions every Monday to Thursday, between 10am and 12pm. You don't need to book an appointment!

Gweithio'n galed dros Gŵyr
Working hard for Gower

Join us in our Weekly Worship

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, our in-person service arrangements are often having to change at short notice in response to new restrictions. For the most up-to-date details, please check our website.

Prior to attending an in-person service, you will need to book a place by contacting Dorothy Dancer, Parish People's Warden, on 07925 148471. To attend a midweek service (a Wednesday or Thursday), you will need to book on a Tuesday evening between 6-9pm and to attend a Sunday service, you will need to book on a Saturday between 6-9pm.

St Catherine's Gorseinon

10.00am Sunday
10.30am Wednesday

St David's Loughor

3.00pm Sunday
10.30am Thursday

For more information on our weekly events and other activities, please visit our website www.stcath.org.uk where you will find the latest details.

 www.stcath.org.uk

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Do you share our vision?

- I would like to meet with a member of the team.
- I would like to know more about what's going on at St Catherine's Church.
- I would like to get involved.
- I would like to subscribe to this Vision magazine.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____ E-mail _____

*Please return this slip to: St Catherine's Church, Princess Street, Gorseinon, SA4 4US.
A member our team will soon be in touch.*