

**The
October
Treasury
Supplement**

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES



THE WALL

Last week, I was reminded by a friend that we are entering the seventh month of Covid-19 pandemic. He recounted the details of an article that had impressed him. The author was talking about facing difficulties and how for many, the sixth month of any struggle can mean hitting some wall or other. The article concluded by saying that during these last months we have learnt

resilience, as well as new and creative ways of working, communicating, shopping and much more. The point being, that what we have learnt will help us over the wall, around the wall, or even through the wall!

After listening to my friend's eloquent interpretation of how a wall can not only stop us, confine us or even imprison us, he then went on to

share Psalm 91, where we read of how God's wall is shelter, shade and shield and of hope in abundance. Good news indeed and what an encouragement for this time.

A few days later again thinking of how my friend, Aled Job had used the wall metaphor so effectively, I decided to go further and show how God has provided us with His own walls of protection. Each is important and to exclude one would weaken the entire structure.

The first 'wall' is God's Word. For many of us, the following verse is a comfort even though it promises to discipline us, should we need correction. 'All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right' (2

Timothy 3: 16). God's Word is able to set clear walls or boundaries for believers, establishing how we ought to live our lives.

The second wall is prayer, or our communication with God, during which we acknowledge that He is almighty and that we are

we must also be in healthy, wholesome relationships with other believers

simple human beings. It could mean crying out to the Lord as David does in Psalm 51, 'Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love.' Or maybe we just cry out, "Father" when we feel alone and need to be reminded of the protection our relationship with our Heavenly Father brings.

Thirdly, there's the fellowship we have with

other believers. Just as prayer cultivates our relationship with God, we must also be in healthy, wholesome relationships with other believers—to encourage and strengthen them - allowing them to do the same for us. Just as we read in Hebrews 10: 24 - 25, ‘Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together.’

The final wall is one of praise and worship. These are powerful tools that can be used to build, rebuild or sustain our wall of protection. Through praise we acknowledge who God is and our dependence on Him. The book of Psalms is rich with examples of Songs of Praise. It is a wonderful place to begin, and then move into praising God for His acts of mercy and grace toward us.

These four walls are not meant to be an exhaustive list. As you come before the Lord in prayer, may He reveal other ways in which He is your ‘wall of protection’, your fence or boundary, from whatever may be coming against you or from whatever is hitting you right now.

A Prayer:

Father God, we thank you again today that we have your protection. And even though we do know something of this protection, we pray now that we might find ourselves experiencing yet more of that fortification that belongs only to you. In Jesus’ name we pray.

AMEN.

W Bryn Willams is minister in Capel y Drindod, Pwelli

COVID 19: FROM A MIZO-MALAGASY VIEWPOINT

I am Malagasy, living in Wales for nearly a decade, and feel at home here. Wales fits naturally for my wife Rebecca and I as our common ground because of our different origins - Mizoram and Madagascar. Our two daughters, Hannah and Seren are more 'Welsh' than the two of us. We moved here when Hannah was two years old and she is now twelve. Seren was born in the Royal Glamorgan Hospital in south Wales. For the girls, Wales is no doubt their home and anywhere else is a holiday place. Although I should be acclimatised by now, the cold and wet weather is still a challenge, and the number of cups of tea that people

drink every day still amazes me.

I often compare life here in Wales and the life in Madagascar. Putting aside the incomparable weather, I am often gob-smacked with the differences even in tiny things, like the price of tinned tomatoes. In Madagascar, tinned tomatoes are a luxury and expensive. I was shocked when I first arrived in Wales to know that tinned tomatoes are cheaper than fresh ones. In Madagascar, you can get a basket full of fresh tomatoes for the price of one tin of tomatoes.

Another comparison that I often make is church congregations here in the



UK and those in Madagascar. I am used to seeing churches with people packed like 'sardines' in Madagascar. The first time I attended my first service in Wales, I was wondering why people are late for church, but when the service started, I realised few people go to church here. I am sure the brave Welsh missionaries who went to Madagascar and Mizoram in the 19th century will have mixed feelings about this.

Comparing the UK with Madagascar sounds silly and incomparable, but that is the struggle of having two

homes, or even three, if I include Mizoram. The first is in the top ten richest countries in the world and the second is in the top ten poorest countries in the world. Both countries are both beautiful, but their differences are staggering in many ways.

This Coronavirus pandemic has highlighted even more the differences between the two countries. I was amazed at the response that the UK government has made to help people during the lockdown, including paying the wages of more than a million people, the eating out

scheme to help businesses and many more. People are encouraged to work from home and using technology like Zoom to meet and to communicate. When schools were closed, the school sent work home so that children might not miss learning. The most heart-warming was to see the incredible efforts made by the NHS staff, doctors, and nurses in fighting the virus. The number of hospital beds that have been put in place in a short time to prepare for an eventual overwhelming by the numbers of infected cases was unbelievable.

Despite the pandemic, here in the UK, food was still in abundance and water and electricity uninterrupted. It is encouraging to see everyone trying to look after each other in their community. For a Malagasy living here in Wales, the help and the support that people continue to receive during

this pandemic is unbelievable. The people in this country are so blessed and I hope they appreciate it.

Back home in Madagascar, it is a different story, or would I say a different tragedy.

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This coronavirus pandemic has affected deeply the Malagasy people and have been a disaster for our very frail economy where more than 80% of the population are living below the poverty line of \$1.90 per day. The Malagasy government like other governments have imposed strict restrictions to contain the virus. Lockdown was in place and whoever transgressed the

rules could be facing a severe penalty.

The intention is very good to limit the spread of the virus but most of the population are living on day to day income. Which means that the majority of the population have the terrible choices of staying at home and starve or taking the risk of going to work for food and have a high risk to catch the virus. The government has provided a very little support of daily necessities for few percentages of the population which only last for few days.

In Madagascar, there is no social security, no free healthcare, no free education, only 40% of the population have access to clean water and only 15% have access to electricity. Madagascar is amongst the countries most affected by climate change, and drought is a big issue in the

south of Madagascar.

According to UNICEF, before Covid-19 pandemic strikes, the prevalence of chronic malnutrition had been estimated at 42%, i.e nearly 1.9 million Malagasy children under five years old across the country. Since the pandemic many people have lost their jobs, public transport is restricted, public schools are closed, and international commercial flights are suspended.

More than 80% of the population in Madagascar are farmers. My parents who live 15 kms outside the capital said many people from the villages are walking every day with their heavy loads and passing their street at 2 o'clock in the morning to go the city to try to sell their products.

I have heard so many tragic stories from Madagascar during this pandemic and I

am very sad and feel helpless about it. I am fortunate to be in this country during this time, but I feel guilty to share news from here with my friends and family in Madagascar about all the support that people receive here. People in Madagascar will never understand about the furlough scheme, as for them work means income, income means living. Work is a life or death situation.

This Coronavirus pandemic is a tragedy for many and an opportunity for few. Like any other poor and developing country, Madagascar has received hundreds of millions dollar of funds/ loans from international financial institutions and banks to help with this pandemic, which of course must be paid back with interest. How can a country with 80% of its population living on under \$1.90 a day will

Only 15% of the population have access to electricity

manage to repay this huge debt back on top of the enormous debt already there? Unfortunately, loans like this have a little impact on the social and financial life of the local population in the poor countries.

According to the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International, Madagascar is ranked the 158th least corrupt nation out of 180 countries. The funds and loans like these seem to be a gift from banks and big financial institutions.

Madagascar is a beautiful country, rich in biodiversity with many endemic species (If you have a doubt, watch David Attenborough's programme on the country). Revd David Griffiths, one of the Welsh

pioneer missionaries to Madagascar over 200 years ago described Madagascar as 'the land of milk and honey'. It is inconceivable that one of the richest countries in biodiversity and resources in the world is also one of its poorest countries. Maybe seventy years under French occupation have something to do with this. Unfortunately this is not only happening to Madagascar.

In times of global crises like these, people often focus on the problem they have in their own country. Poor countries like Madagascar who never made the news headlines are easily forgotten.

It is hard for me not to compare Wales and Madagascar because both are my homes, yet they are so different. Wales and Madagascar have a strong

historical link that binds them together because of the successful work of the Welsh missionaries who went to Madagascar over two-hundred years ago. I often remind people here in Wales that your history is our history, and our history is your history.

Borrowing Revd David Griffiths' fiery words when he left Madagascar for Machynlleth in 1843: 'Whoever's heart is saddened by the events in Madagascar... They deserve our concern...they are our brothers...Have the Welsh forgotten pity – that they have a little sister close to Africa called Madagascar? Surely not! Madagascar is the fruit of their prayers: Therefore brothers do not forget her.'

Miara Rabearisoa is a Mission Enabler in Montgomery and district.



A LIFE REMEMBERED

Revd Robert Irwin

Robert Irwin was one of four compatriots to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Wales within the last forty-five years. He served his adopted Church in ecumenical ventures in Newport and Cardiff for a decade until retirement, following his ordination to the ministry by Mr R Lloyd Davies (Moderator of the Association in the East) in 1987.

Being born in Wilmont Cottage, Drumbeg, near Lisburn in 1933, just twelve years after the partition of Ireland inspired some of his poetry, and this is exemplified by his poem, *Colour Schemes*;

*Baptised into red-white-and-blue or green-white-and-gold hatreds,
we snarl our petrol-bomb slogans into each others faces.
Will a day come when we pause, pray and consider whether by some miraculous grace, God might be colour-blind?*

His soft Irish accent, which he never lost, stood in contrast to the booming

Lambeg drum which shares its name with the neighbouring village, and was widely seen as provocative by some although an affirmation of presence for others in the divided communities of Northern Ireland.

He qualified as a Quantity Surveyor after attending Lisburn Technical College and it was through a work placement in south Wales that he met his future wife, Gwynneth. They were to be devoted to one another for a further sixty-three years. When he was thirty-one, they crossed St George's Channel and settled eventually in Pontarddulais where he sensed a call to the ministry in his middle years. This was after thirty-six years of work experiences that involved him in construction work on the M4, and the expansion of the campus at Swansea University.

Unlike his literary hero Thomas Hardy, who died five years before he was born, Robert had an accepting and contemplative faith, as well

as a keen appreciation of nature and life around him. He was an accomplished poet, and many of his poems recall his Irish roots and subsequent life lived around the Loughor estuary. In his latter years he reflected on the influences that had stirred him,

*Was it in Pontardulais or
Lisburn
that you in your school-days
best knew?*

*Was it Lagan's waters or
Llwchwr's
that shared their young
secrets with you?*

His earlier poetry was published in two volumes, *Some Unmeasured Canaan* and *Many Ways*. Some of his work was also published by the Salopian Poetry Society. His final collection, *Homings* contains over two-hundred poems. Dedicated to 'Madge on behalf of her children who died in infancy', it leaves the reader flummoxed and wondering if Robert himself was the lone survivor of the children his mother bore, since he adds the text from the book

of Job, “and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.”

As a minister he confined his sphere to the local church and Glamorgan Presbytery East, once describing Committees in verse as ‘ditchwater clerical meetings where verbosity rules the agenda’. He was by nature more comfortable in the company of a few, rather than in being the heart and soul of a gathering. However, those who sought his counsel found him to be an attentive listener and a wise confidante. He is well described by one of his three daughters as a ‘kindhearted and dignified soul’.

He died on 15th November 2018. His funeral took place on 4th of December and was conducted by his friend and former neighbour, Revd John Walters, assisted by Revd Paul Morgan.

Iain B Hodgins

Email to Editor:

From: Mr David Boorman,
Tabernacle, Penclawdd

We live in a very uncertain world. We have questions after questions but there seems to be no answers. Will Brexit be concluded in a satisfactory way? If not, what will be the effect on food prices? Will I catch Covid 19? Will I lose my job? The questions are endless.

Are there any certainties for us as Christians? Most definitely there are;

1. God, in Christ, loves us. 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me' (Galatians 2: 20) 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3: 16)

2. We are no longer under condemnation. 'There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.' (Romans 8: 1)
Before we came to Christ in repentance and faith were

under condemnation. However, at Calvary, Christ felt the full weight of God's wrath and justice for our sins.

3. We are eternally secure. 'Nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'. (Romans 8: 35ff). That does not mean that we will be free from trials and temptations but they will not pull us away from Christ.

4. We have a glorious future to look forward to. Although we will have to confront the last enemy, death. what is the other side of death is beyond comprehension. We will be with Christ, we will see Him and we will be like Him. Can you think of anything more wonderful than that? I can't. It will be for all eternity. If the current situation weighs heavily on you, immerse yourself in these truths!

News from the Churches

ALPHA BUILTH WELLS

Harvest Thanksgiving Service was held in Alpha on 4th October with a good number of worshippers attending from the home church and others joining from further afield. The hymns were provided by CD and had a thanksgiving theme. The harvest message was given by Revd Brian Reardon (Minister) and was based on Matthew 20, and the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, with special emphasis on those who came at the eleventh hour. The harvest gifts this year were donated expressly so that they could be given to the local Food Bank making the celebration one that was directly connected with those in need.

YARDRO

As the shutters came down on worship in church buildings last March, it was time even for the smallest of our

churches to close. 'Smallest' because that is what this country chapel is in Radnorshire by dimension and the number of worshippers.

There were doubts about whether the chapel would open again as the congregation consists of just a few ageing ladies, albeit devout and very regular in attendance.

It was quite a surprise that when permission to open church buildings for worship again was permitted, this church sought to do so and a request was received asking to purchase the necessary signage and equipment that would permit this to happen.

The church opened for the first service on Sunday, 24th September. It was difficult to get the ladies to understand the reasons for risk assessment and reviews for such a tiny place. When the church reopened opened at 3pm eleven people turned up ready for worship after over six months absence. All

credit to those ladies for their resolve and encouragement to make the reopening very special, and for their determination to continue with services until the need ceases to wear face masks, use hand gel and keep two metres apart!

TYDDYN STREET, MOLD

 The United Church (URC/PCW) at Tyddyn Street Mold held its first service back on site after six months of absence because of lockdown. Held in the open air to meet Covid restrictions on numbers, many regular church-goers were able to meet in the church gardens as a start to their return. The service was led by the Minister, Revd Dr Kathryn Price and in welcoming the members and friends, she said that it was appropriate to meet open air, showing that the church is not the building but the people who worship. This is something well noticed in recent months when the building has been closed, but the church has been very

active. Taking the theme of the Season of Creation, Dr Price said that with the challenges of the pandemic and climate change, the clear Bible message was that people are part of creation and we are all called to care for, and not exploit, nature and planet earth.

The service was subject to the rules guiding safe meeting during Covid restrictions and this meant that the number attending, even outside, was limited. As part of the celebration of the return, members brought decorations for the ironwork around the building and the Wild Garden and the Easter Garden were refreshed.

One of the Tyddyn Street elders, Mervyn Phillips described how the enforced lockdown has opened new channels of fellowship contact - becoming an important spiritual and mental support. Sadly, the restrictions of recent weeks that have been imposed in Flintshire to help counter the rise in Coronavirus infections has meant that the services have had to

revert to being on-line ones only. It is hoped, however, that this will just be a temporary measure.

MID WALES AND BORDER AREA - The Bible Course to begin in November

Make the most of things this autumn - you may have a limited social life due to Covid restrictions, but that's the perfect opportunity to do some on-line learning!

For those in the Mid-Wales & Border area, the Presbyterian Church of Wales are running the Bible Society's 'Bible Course', from November.

Meet weekly with friends from across the Presbytery on-line, and watch a short video followed by discussion. The course gives a useful overview of the Bible and it's themes, in a lively, contemporary format:

“The Bible Course is a brilliant and accessible way to understand the full Bible story.



A brilliant way to kick-start your journey.”

The course is open to all - members and friends. For more information, and to register for the course, contact Revd Monica O'Dea.

monica.odea@ebpcpw.org.uk

Tel: 01686 430988.

A preview of the materials can be seen on the Bible Society website.