

Presbyterian Church of Wales – Church and Society Department

‘Linking Churches with Schools – the experiences of church members’

Vaughan Salisbury, PCW Education Officer (November 2023)

Background

In 2022, the Free Church Council for Wales asked me to revise and update Gillian Wood's booklet, *Linking Churches and Schools*, Churches Together in England, 2003. FCCW received my revised version later that year (2022) and sent it to members of the Council and their churches to read and implement.

In September 2022, the Welsh Government's Curriculum for Wales began to be implemented in our primary and secondary schools. As part of this new curriculum it requires schools to ensure that learners develop a genuine sense of 'cynefin'. Cynefin is considered a place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar and where we can recognise sights and sounds that give us security. It allows learners to develop a strong sense of individual identity and understand how this connects with and is shaped by wider influences. Churches and chapels are of course an integral part of this cynefin and this opens up opportunities for local churches (like other local organisations) to deepen their links with their local schools. By doing this, churches contribute to creating a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and mental development of learners and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

In considering these exciting developments, I thought it would be beneficial to collect examples from members of the denomination's churches on what their links were with their local schools and especially so on the issue of Collective Worship and teaching in a school. With the collaboration of Eleri Melhuish and Dr Carys Moseley from the denomination's Office and the Clerks of Presbyteries and church Secretaries, I received sufficient responses during 2023 to consider it worthwhile to share them with our denominational churches by the end of the year. I am well aware that links already exist and have existed between churches and schools for many years but no one, as far as I know, has collated these experiences and shared them for information and inspiration on this matter. May I therefore thank you all for your contributions and for your work with your local schools. It is an important witness and contribution to the Christian mission in our society.

The aim of this document is to give an insight into the links that exist between our denominational churches and their local schools. I'm sure that there are more examples available but these are the ones that I received. The following experiences from members of the denomination have been presented in the order in which I received them by email since the beginning of the year (2023).

1. Dwryrd Williams, Salem, Dolgellau, Meirion District.

On Wednesday afternoon, October 26th, 2022, 185 pupils from Ysgol Bro Idris (Dolgellau Primary Department, aged 4-11 years) came to Salem chapel, Dolgellau (PCW) to hold their Thanksgiving service. A similar number of parents and grandparents came to the chapel to support the children. Suitable presentations, readings and songs contributed to a highly rewarding service. During the service an address was given by Mr Dwryrd Williams, the chapel's secretary. It was a great pleasure to have an opportunity to re-establish the link between the town's places of worship and the local school following the Covid period.

2. Eirian Rowlands, Parc, Llandyfydog, North Anglesey (Môn) District.

Having heard about the Open the Book scheme, I asked the Headteacher at Ysgol Penysarn if I could come and read stories from the Bible to the children. I started there in September 2018. I have also started at Llannerch-y-Medd school in 2022. I take some simple clothing for the children to wear and while I read the story (having given them an outline summary), they act out the story. It was not possible to go during the pandemic but when it was safe to return I also used knitted dolls. We are now once again using costumes and the children ask if there is an opportunity for them to participate. The staff, children and I enjoy the experience and the socialising whilst sharing stories from the Bible.

3. Dr Alun Thomas, Môn (Anglesey).

One example I would like to refer to is the relationship between Rhos y Gad United Church, Llanfairpwll and the local school. As Minister I have been holding services at the school with the Open the Book team every half term which are greatly appreciated by the teachers. The School uses the Chapel for their Thanksgiving and Christmas services.

4. Trefor Jones, Bethesda, Mold, Flint District.

Before the pandemic primary schools came to the chapel for Thanksgiving and Christmas Services; Jamborama with pupils from 5 Flintshire Welsh schools with representatives taking part in a celebration led by Wendy Swan, Mold school worker organised by Agathos, and Lowri Mitton, part-time youth worker organised by the Presbytery; Visits in groups of 20-25 pupils from Ysgol Alun, Mold studying the town's Places of Worship comparing them in terms of the history of the buildings and their construction; service arrangements; provisions for celebrations such as baptisms, weddings and funerals; link between the church and charity activity as they were challenged to spend £1 each in a charity shop in town - fortunately we have several here in aid of various good causes relating to people and animals on a local, national and international level. As the Vestry is at the back of the chapel and easily accessible, it was used for a chocolate Easter Egg Hunt for children and their parents/childminders during a 'Ti a Fi' (baby and toddler) session on the Friday morning before the Easter holidays. The activity was developed as a means of presenting the Easter message to everyone who came there - all of the chocolate eggs were found by the

time they left the chapel! A weekly Christian Youth Club was also held with an opportunity for them to consider becoming members especially when leaving home.

5. The Reverend Evan Morgan, Salem, Canton, Cardiff, East Glamorgan District.

Links with schools pre-Covid: as Minister I received invitations from several schools over a wide area to take services, talk about my work, talk about the main festivals of the Church (primary schools). I am hoping, following my Moderatorship, to resume the relationship. 2/3 schools use Salem for Thanksgiving/Christmas services. Many of our members are teachers/headteachers.

6. Marian Jones, Capel y Groes Ebeneser, Wrexham District.

Here is some information about the relationship with Welsh schools in the Wrexham area.

Open the Book teams visit all Welsh-medium primary schools every half term. There are three Welsh-medium Open the Book teams in the county:

Wrexham Team - serving three schools (Ysgol Plas Coch, Ysgol Bodhyfryd and Ysgol Bro Alun) and the intention is to add Ysgol Llan y Pwll in about a year's time. During lockdown the Open the Book message was sent to the schools as a web recording.

Rhosllannerchrugog Team - serving three schools

Llangollen Team - serving three schools including Ysgol Gwernant, Llangollen which is in Denbighshire.

The teams include approximately 15 volunteers who all have a current DBS. The material has already been prepared for us by Open the Book (Bible Society).

The visits are appreciated by all the schools and the children really enjoy them, because they get to join in by acting out parts of the story. It also gives us satisfaction as volunteers.

7. The Reverend Aled Lewis Evans, Capel y Groes Ebeneser, Wrexham District.

Under the care of Siwan Jones (Capel y Groes Ebeneser, Wrexham) there is a Hwyl Hwyr Club for children and CIC (youth club) for those in their teens. In some recent CIC sessions there have been discussions between myself, Siwan, and the young people, as 3 of our young people have asked to be baptised.

Yale College tertiary students came on annual visits with their Welsh studies to see Capel y Groes Ebeneser. The lecturer Carys Roberts brought A-level Welsh second language students, and it was always lovely to meet them, and see their high standard of spoken Welsh.

Every Christmas Ysgol Morgan Llwyd hosts an evening for the chapel Society and the chapel welcomes a number of parents and a sizeable congregation. We have also recently had a special concert by the young people of DYNAMIC and their sign language choir. They meet in the chapel twice a week.

Last Christmas the Christian Union of Chester University came to hold their Carol Service in St John Street Chapel, Chester. We had a candlelit evening of carol singing together with a short message and music by a classical ensemble of

students who are in the Christian Union. For me this was one of the highlights of the year for the chapel at Chester to have this link, and to see the chapel full of young people.

Our young people in Wrexham assist with making tea/coffee after the Service, have washed cars for the Christian Aid Seeds of Hope Appeal, and helped host a coffee morning also towards the Seeds of Hope Appeal as well as a Bingo Night.

8. Nia Higginbotham, Seilo, Eglwys Unedig Gymraeg, Llandudno, Glannau District.

I spoke to two classes, year 8 (around 60 pupils) over one day in lessons of 45 minutes each. This included talking about Fair Trade, a quiz about Fair Trade, activities etc. This was held at Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan, Abergele. Before that I visited 5 primary schools talking about Fair Trade in their Service and also Ysgol y Gogarth for a series of lessons.

9. Helen Gibbon, Babel Zion Newydd, Carmarthen, Carmarthen District.

Llangynnwr, Nantgaredig and Derwen schools are the three schools that receive the Open the Book provision in my area near Carmarthen. The members of the teams come from the local chapels and the pleasure we get from performing and presenting the stories from the Old and New Testaments is contagious! The standard costumes of the period add to the scenes and the polished performances. But more importantly the provision is given an enthusiastic welcome by teachers and pupils alike. Indeed the children are eager to take part and it's great to see and hear them laughing, smiling, open-mouthed, concentrating, reciting the Lord's Prayer following the period of calm and reflection provided within the structure. It's a tonic for the soul. The schools' Christmas services are held in their local chapels and I know from personal experience of the good relationship between Ysgol Llangynnwr and Capel y Babel Zion Newydd, Pensarn. Many of the parents and children come to the vestry for refreshments after lighting the Christmas tree and teachers come to give lessons on the chapel building and Christian customs and practices. The school choir has also contributed to several services in the past and one highlight was setting up a 'Write a letter to God' competition. In addition to this, Bibles are presented annually to the children of Llangynnwr school and Ysgol y Dderwen from the collection fund of the town's St David's Day service. This is an occasion in itself.

10. Huw Roberts, Bro Nant Conwy Pastorate.

A very important element of the pastorate's work is engaging with the local community, and a close link and relationship with the schools is essential to this. This is a key part of the work of the area pastorate under the New Ministries and Church beyond Walls project led by the Reverend Owain Davies.

Within the pastorate the Minister regularly visits 8 Primary Schools and 1 Secondary School which includes a talk/service. Some of these schools also hold their Thanksgiving and Christmas services within our chapels. The minister also keeps in touch by attending school events e.g. Summer Fair, Shows, concerts etc. Because of this close relationship the schools have been extremely supportive in promoting

the church's activities, such as sharing information about Sunday schools, CIC Clubs, events with the parents and interested parties.

We have also had the opportunity to invite schools to our chapels for 'Taith Y Pasg', which is a live and practical presentation for the children of the story of Easter, e.g. washing the children's feet, eating the last supper etc. The next step for developing the relationship is to establish an Open the Book team within the Pastorate to attend schools in order to share Bible stories and bring them to life for children.

11. Jane Eleri Davies, Capel y Morfa, Aberystwyth, North Cardigan District.

Links between Capel y Morfa Aberystwyth and schools in the Aberystwyth Area:

- a) Open the Book: The Open the Book team was established in Aberystwyth District about five years ago which included members from a number of churches in the area. During the Covid period we were recording and sending the recording to the Ysgol Gymraeg and Ysgol Llanilar. We continue to go to Ysgol Gymraeg once a month;
- b) Also in the pre-Covid period, pupils from Ysgol Penweddig together with their classroom assistant made coffee in the Morlan Centre for the Prayer and Coffee Circle in order to build skills and confidence, and returned in November 2022 to help with refreshments and soup at the 'Warm Place' in the Morlan;
- c) The Christmas Experience was held in the Morlan four years ago, inviting pupils (Year 5) in their groups to visit four scenes from the Christmas story and hear the experiences of the characters. A valuable experience for everyone and worth repeating in the future.

12. Nia Williams, (Education Officer with PCW's Children, Youth and Families Team), Capel y Drindod, Pwllheli, Dwyfor District.

Tudweiliog

There is a close relationship with the School - collaboration in terms of chapel events and the children's club.

The school uses the Chapel for Christmas services and rehearsals.

The Reverend Gwyn Rhydderch (member of the local chapel - and PCW's Head of Communications and Projects) hosts a Children's Club with a local team and takes pictures of the children at the school for the parents every Christmas. The Open the Book team has been active over the years. The Reverend Olwen Williams, a retired local minister regularly leads services.

Pwllheli

The Reverend Bryn Williams, the Minister, has led services over the years in the schools within the pastorate, as well as speaking about baptism and marriage and joining the Christmas Service procession.

A very good relationship exists with the schools that support the Children's Club and the Youth Club in the Pwllheli pastorate.

Local schools use the chapel for Christmas services and shows.

Llithfaen

There is a small active group there with a small Sunday School. The children attend

Ysgol Pentreuchaf and in the past members of the chapel have been supporting the Children's Club.

I lead Collective Worship once a term and a team from different chapels join together to present a Christmas Service at the end of the autumn term in 29 schools in Gorllewin Gwynedd and Arfon Presbyteries.

Discussion club with Year 5 and 6 at Ysgol Pont y Gof, Botwnnog once every half term.

Schools visit Coleg y Bala (denominational youth centre) for the Easter Days on a regular basis from the Gorllewin Gwynedd Presbytery and other presbyteries within reach of the College.

13. The Reverend Aled Davies, Area Ministry Chwilog District including Capel Uchaf, Dwyfor District. Director of Sunday Schools Council/Cyhoeddiadau'r Gair.

Every year we hold a meeting under the auspices of the churches at Ysgol Gynradd Chwilog at the end of the summer term, in order to say goodbye to year 6 children who are on their way to secondary school and present them with a copy of Y Cam Nesaf and Beibl.net This is a meeting where parents and members of the chapel come together.

Every Christmas we have a carol-singing service with all the school children, where parents and friends come together at the chapel. The school presents items and there is also congregational singing. Each child receives a book as a gift sponsored by the churches.

Every two years we organise a mock wedding in the chapel, where all the children come dressed in their best clothes. They hold a wedding between two of the children, and we re-create a traditional wedding in the chapel. A member who was married in the chapel 50 years ago joins us, and shares her memories, showing her wedding dress to the children. They are also given a tour around the chapel in order to show the different features of the place of worship. When we have a coffee morning in the hall on Friday morning we invite the children to join us e.g. at Children in Need day, where they set up a stall and we have the opportunity to buy and give our support.

14. Vaughan Salisbury, Capel Unedig Seion, Glynceiriog, Wrexham District.

Following the launch of the New Curriculum for Wales in September 2022, and the idea of 'cynffin' in that curriculum, it was decided at a church elders meeting in the Spring of this year (2023), that we would present four suggestions to the Headteacher of Ysgol Gynradd Cynddelw, Glynceiriog (our local school in the Ceiriog valley) on how we might contribute as a chapel to the educational work of the school. Two elders visited the school on 18th May to discuss the four suggestions below with Mrs Lora Sockett, the Headteacher. We received a warm and friendly welcome from her and she greatly appreciated our suggestions. The following four proposals were submitted:

a) consider using the chapel as a resource for some Religious, Values and Ethics lessons. We have already presented, at the request of one teacher, two

lessons in the chapel on the sacrament of Baptism;

b) that one or two of us, as required, lead Collective Worship in the school;

c) that the school celebrates some of the major festivals of the Christian religion in the chapel, e.g. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Three classes from the school came to celebrate Thanksgiving in the chapel on the 19th of October, 2023. The children's parents were also invited to the service. There was a very positive response from the headteacher after the service and we hope that we will be able to develop the relationship further through e.g. holding a carol service at Christmas time.

d) offer a financial contribution to the school for dedicated educational resources.

We are co-operating well ecumenically with the Reverend Dr Cass Meurig, the Church in Wales on this scheme.

15. Members who represent the denomination on Local Authority SACRES (2023):

Flintshire County Council SAC/RE – The Reverend Huw Ll. Powell-Davies (Gogledd-Ddwyrain Presbytery)

Wrexham County Borough Council SAC/RE – Vaughan Salisbury (Gogledd-Ddwyrain Presbytery)

Denbighshire County Council SAC/RE – The Reverend Brian Huw Jones (Dyffryn Clwyd Presbytery)

Conwy County Borough Council SAC/RE – Huw Roberts (Conwy Dyfrdwy Presbytery)

Isle of Anglesey County Council SAC/RE – Huw Goronwy Owen (Môn Presbytery)

Cyngor Gwynedd SAC/RE – Gwawr Maelor Williams (Arfon Presbytery)

Ceredigion County Council SAC/RE – The Reverend Dr. John Tudno Williams 2022 (Ceredigion a Gogledd Penfro Presbytery)

Carmarthenshire Council SAC/RE – Helen Gibbon (Myrddin Presbytery)

Cardiff Council SAC/RE – Rheinallt Thomas (Morgannwg-Llundain Presbytery)

16. Members of the denomination who are School Governors (2023):

Ysgol Llanrwst – Huw Roberts (Conwy Dyfrdwy Presbytery)

Ysgol Ysbyty Ifan – Bethan Trenchard (Conwy Dyfrdwy Presbytery)

Cymerau and Abererch Primary Schools - Nia Williams, Education Officer with PCW's Children, Youth and Families Team, (Gorllewin Gwynedd Presbytery).

Ysgol Glan y Môr, Pwllheli – The Reverend Bryn Williams, (Gorllewin Gwynedd Presbytery).

Many members of Capel Salem, Canton including the Reverend Evan Morgan, the minister, are school governors.