



Newsletter Autumn 2016

Eglwysbach STEPS out

The first priority is to ask ourselves a question and be totally honest. Are we satisfied with the situation in our churches in Wales today? The answer is obvious, i.e no, we are not satisfied in any shape or form. Nevertheless, all of us are dreaming and yearning for people to return to a vibrant relationship with Jesus. And, as a result, for his Church to grow and his Kingdom reach out to impact all aspects of life in the chapel and community. But how can we do this and what is the first step?



The Revd. Gerwyn Roberts

As church leaders we decided to inquire about the STEP plan, and following a discussion, Rev Gwyn Rhydderch was invited to come to meet us and explain all about STEP. This proved to be a most constructive meeting and following a further discussion, it was agreed that we would indeed join the scheme. The truth is that we can't continue as we are, we must be bold and "step" out in a new direction. Gwyn came back to see us to get the ball rolling. We then set about finding out about the present situation of the chapel and the community.

It was an eye opener to find out how much activity is already taking place, so it's not all bad news, and thanks be to God for that! What strikes us in particular is that nothing will happen to extend his kingdom without





Eglwysbach Elders

prayer, because "our efforts will all be in vain without God's blessing on our work"

Since our meeting, we have set up a women's committee and the activities which have resulted from that have cheered our hearts and breathed new life into the chapel.

As we have discovered as a chapel, small steps are the way ahead, and we should never be afraid of failing. Failing is not always a negative since we can always learn from our experiences as Nehemiah did. It's all too easy to become disheartened and listen to the negative voices but "Believe in God and do your work".

Therefore let us continue to build until the work is finished. The history of Nehemiah proves a great encouragement for us today, and as he shouted from the top of the wall "I have important work on-going, therefore I cannot come down". That in response to the treacherous invitation from the Samaritan to come down and give up on the work. Nehemiah resists the temptation to come down and as a result, the walls are built up and the city is safeguarded. "Let us set about the work" and "step" ahead in God's might.

The Revd. Gerwyn Roberts

Have you visited our website?

www.camustep.cymru





Ideas for Christmas



As I'm writing this there are 127 days until Christmas – it's ages away, so no need to think about it for at least another 100 days! But, although we may not need to start our personal preparations for a long time yet, if we want our church to make the most of the fantastic opportunities for outreach over the Christmas Season, the earlier the better!

As we've visited churches this year and spoken to many people we've heard lots of great ideas from you. Some take quite a lot of energy and planning, like the church who put on Christmas lunch for members of the congregation and local community who were on their own. But others are much simpler, like setting up a table in town to wrap presents for shoppers and raise money for charity, give out mince pies to local shop and business workers, hold a 'pram service' for the Toddler group. Lots of you are now members of Open the Book teams and some of you have arranged **Star in the Stable** at your local school/village/town Christmas Fayre. This fun activity invites people of all ages to dress up as a character from the Nativity story, pose with a manger and baby Jesus and be photographed on their own mobile phone, giving them a permanent reminder of the Christmas

story. <https://scriptureunioncymru.com/2015/10/08/a-pop-up-mission-activity-for-christmas/>

An excellent website to check out is <http://www.evangelismideas.org/search.aspx?f=Christmas> website has an entire section devoted to ideas for the Christmas Season. You'll find ideas for individuals, churches, youth/children's groups and Sunday Schools.

Scripture Union have an amazing resource called **Christmas Wrapped**, a book which again is full of ideas for lots of situations. They also have a primary schools presentation with the same name, and lots of churches use this and invite their local school Year 2 class to visit the church for a morning/afternoon of activities. They also produce a Christmas comic – in Welsh and English – that is suitable for giving out to school children, and a simple tract **Star in the Stable**. These can be ordered on the Scripture Union website - <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/9145.id#.V8VPul-cGUK>





The **Bible Society** also produce a short, attractive booklet for primary school children. They also produce a booklet for youth or those new to church entitled *Might There Be More to Christmas?* The booklet:



- Includes a short introduction focusing on the Christmas story.
- Includes the Gospel of Luke in an easy-to-read, dynamic translation, ideal for youth and those new to church.
- Would be useful for outreach as well as within churches for those with questions about Christianity and faith.

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/products/9780564043873/>



The **STEP** file contains stories from different churches who have tried many of these Christmas ideas, why not have a read and be inspired to try something new this year to share the Good News of Jesus birth in your community? Please contact me for more information about the file.

Sarah Morris
STEP officer, south-east Wales

Partnering

Rebuilding the walls calls for TEAMWORK

We would all acknowledge that some jobs are impossible to fulfill on your own, and actually, if you think about it most jobs require teamwork. The GP we visit when we are ill, for instance, has been trained by other qualified doctors, he needs the administrative

team to facilitate his appointments, and depends on the pharmacist for the right medicine to treat us successfully.

The New Testament teaching is that individual Christians are part of a team from the moment they believe





and decide to follow Christ. This 'team' is called the church, the Body of Christ, the flock of God, God's building/house amongst many other descriptions.

Remembering this is essential when we face the reality of our situation as Gospel churches in Wales today. We are God's people, and we are part of His team – so whatever we seek to do to share the Good News in our communities is done in this context.

Study 4 in the Nehemiah series looks at this subject of God's people working as a team, based on Chapters 3 and 11. Many people find reading lists of names in Bible passages too tedious, but they are there for a reason, and one reason is to show us that Nehemiah didn't rebuild the walls of Jerusalem on his own – he had 42 teams working on 7 different sections, which included people of every part of society, rich, poor, ordinary, important. People used their different skills, or just gave their labour, and every one had a vital role to play.

This is exactly what the apostle Paul emphasised to the church in Corinth when he used the body allegory to describe how we are all inter-dependent, all important, all with a vital role to play in the church. In years gone by in Wales the minister has been expected to do everything himself – preaching, teaching, visiting, children's work, Women's Guild, Fellowship meetings – but this isn't the picture Paul paints of the church. Today of course, many of our churches don't have a minister or have to share their minister with several other



churches so it's more important that we can acknowledge the gifts we, and others have, and that we use them! It is encouraging to hear how congregations are working with other churches on projects like the Foodbank and Open the Book and that this proves to be a source of blessing and effective witness.

How would you describe the 'team' in your church? What skills/gifts do you have? Could you work together better? How much partnership is taking place between churches in your area for the sake of the Gospel?

The Nehemiah study series is a very useful tool to help churches face difficult questions about our present situation and possible ways forward using God's Word as our guide and inspiration. Why not get a copy from Gwyn, Meleri or Sarah for your church to use – and remember we are available to lead the studies too.

Sarah Morris
STEP officer, south-east Wales





The effects of the Open the Book scheme



Recently, I had an opportunity to undertake some research work to establish what effect the Open the Book scheme is having beyond the schools themselves. As part of the research, focus group interviews were held with a range of school pupils and school staff, along with an interview with a SACRE representative (Consultative Council on Religious Education) which has a strong influence on the Religious Education curriculum in the schools of Wales, and interviews with Church of Wales workers who engage with the Open The Book scheme regularly. In addition, questionnaires were sent to each OTB team in Britain and the Channel Islands (over 2,000 in number), with responses received from 652 of these.

The results of the research were very interesting. One clear and consistent theme was the high level of praise for this scheme. According to one Headteacher "there are only advantages involved with Open the Book"!

Having spent time questioning groups of children, they felt that Open the Book made the children more able to understand the stories of the Bible, as they could see these stories coming alive in front of them, creating vivid



pictures in their minds. They also felt that Open the Book helped the children with their own particular situations, and encouraged them to think more about others as well. It was also reported that they were more aware of the effect of the behaviour of others and helped them appreciate the importance of forgiveness. One pupil said that he did not believe the Bible stories or God before Open the Book, but that he now believed. It was also seen that Open the Book was able to reach the pupils' families as well, as one pupil explained that he had returned home and repeated that week's particular story to his little sister, making use of the Bible to do so.

Examples were provided by members of the Open the Book teams and workers of the Church of Wales





concerning activities that had emanated from being part of the Open the Book team in various areas:

- Two members of the Open the Book team visiting a school to help the children with their reading and writing.
 - A Sunday school established in one school on a fortnightly basis developing the Open the Book stories further.
 - One school made use of the Open the Book stories to enrich school lessons, e.g the tale of Adam and Eve was used during circle time to explain the difference between good and evil and to ask God to help them do what is good.
 - A lunchtime club opened in one school, making use of worksheets
- as a follow-up to the Open the Book story that week.
 - A service started once a month in an old bakery in the village as the Church building itself was too far from the village to be accessible to the children. It was said that a number of children had attended this service, having never been in the Church itself.
 - One group are to start an after-school club within the school building to hold specific activities linked to the Open the Book session that week.
 - The staff members interviewed said that Open the Book appealed to children of all ages within the school. The visible and interactive format used helps the pupils to remember the stories better, and gains their



attention and interest from the start. Children develop self-confidence and improve their communication skills. Staff also believe that the quiet reflection time which is part of Open the Book's structure allows the pupils to think about their own activities and how elements of the Bible stories relate to their lives. They are able to identify with some Biblical stories and link them with situations that are taking place in our world today, and they are encouraged to think of other people's needs.

In response to the team questionnaires (652), the following was expressed:

- 29.57% believed that the general Christian content in school services had increased since the start of Open the Book.
- 12.91% said that attendance had increased within Sunday schools, Christian clubs and other church related activities.
- 30.9% said that new Christian activities had started as a result of Open the Book, especially Messy Church (27%) and family services (30.9%)
- 88.4% believed that Open the Book had strengthened the partnership between the school and the local church.
- 44.99% said the school had increased its activity within the local church since starting Open the Book.

According to Church of Wales workers, Open the Book has given them an opportunity to develop a relationship with the school and the teachers. The school have trust in the team members and as a result, they are more willing to accept invitations to other activities- e.g Stable Path/Christmas held at the local church where groups of children from the school came along. Other examples were provided of staff members of one school inviting Open the Book team members to create Advent materials with the children.

In essence, Open The Book is a simple scheme to raise awareness of the main Bible stories amongst primary pupils. It has a specific structure which has to be adhered to lest the session goes beyond what is acceptable within school boundaries. It is a means for church members to foster a relationship with the pupils, so that both sides get to know each other better. It is a small step towards becoming a large family and a happy and caring community.

Meleri Cray
STEP Officer, south-west Wales





Open the Book



Ysgol Llangynnwr

At last, the hope of establishing a team of people to present the "Open the Book" scheme at Ysgol Llangynnwr has been realized.

The Headteacher provided us with an opportunity to present two stories at the end of the summer term, not only so that the pupils might have a taste of things to come but also for the team to gain presentation experience. By the second time, the team felt much more confident and were encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by the pupils who took part.

It's been an absolute pleasure to work alongside people from other churches in Carmarthen. Although we all live

close to the school, six churches are represented by the nine members of the team. We knew of each other and following a meeting with Meleri Cray we decided to set about the task.

Our intention is to present the Storyteller's Bible every fortnight, starting the third week of September. This is an excellent resource, and a means for pupils who are unlikely to know about the stories of the Bible, to see them come alive from week to week. In addition to this, the children get to know the members of the team as church members, and that is worth more than words can say.

Helen Gibbon, Capel Babel,
Carmarthen





Ammanford

Members of Zenana (Mission Organisation of Baptist Women) had a memorable experience recently when your Meleri Cray (and a Methodist at that!) came along to open our eyes and spark our imagination! That was a most interesting and hopeful hour. As a result of the talk, a group of volunteers have come together in Ammanford with the intention of visiting a local school regularly to introduce Open the Book to the pupils. We will co-operate with other church members in the area, which includes PCW's Bethani and Capel Newydd, Betws. As there is now no Sunday schools in many places, this is a way for children to hear stories from the Bible, and it is very important that we spread the good news in the secular world. We pray for God's blessing on this scheme and similar schemes wherever they are.

Einir Jones, Ammanford

Bwlchgywynt

We have formed a team of volunteers here in the Tregaron area to present "Open the Book" services at Ysgol Henry Richard. The primary campus head already knew of this scheme since a friend of her mother was a member of the "Open the Book" team in north wales and this was very helpful when the idea of introducing "Open the Book" was presented to her. We are very thankful to Mrs Meleri Cray for the training we received and the intention is to start the service in

September. The stories have been carefully scripted and I believe it to be an excellent way of presenting the Bible in primary schools.

The Revd. Carwyn Arthur, Tregaron

North Gower

Open the Book clearly fired the imagination of people in the Presbyterian churches of north Gower as nineteen people signed up to participate in the programme following a well attended initial meeting at the start of the year. Our team comprises some who make costumes and props and others who comprise four teams to go into school each Wednesday for thirty minutes. With ten minutes to get ourselves ready, we spend about fifteen minutes dramatising and reading the story.

Everything others say about Open the Book is true! It worked for us in ways others have told us it did for them. The children recognise us in the community, and the teachers have greeted us warmly as the weeks have passed.





Our team is made up of folk aged 90 to 60 - most people under that age are working in school time! Some have discovered talents they never realised they had, and the stories we've told in school have often had an application in our church life and its teaching.

Our school caretaker even turned a Pirate ship from the Christmas School play into Noah's ark!

Possibly the first step was the hardest, but once we got going we were delighted to discover we could do it, reassured by the response of the children who watched and listened.

The Revd. Iain Hodgins, Penclawdd

Pontyberem a Bancffosfelen

I'm so glad that the churches of Pontyberem/Bancffosfelen have agreed to form an Open the Book group. We are having fun (yes, fun!!) in preparing to launch this project next term, and we are much closer as denominations already. Rather than complaining "the children don't come along", planning to act positively in taking the stories of the Bible to the school has raised all our spirits.

The Revd. Catrin Roberts, Pontyberem

Newcastle Emlyn

Every Monday morning, since January 201, I go along to hold a service in our local school with a group of members from the Anglican Churches in the Newcastle Emlyn area. We follow the Open the Book scheme, and so far the

pupil have been watching, listening, co-acting and praying with us on the twelve stories. They are really enjoying the project! The response both from pupils and staff has been excellent. We present in Welsh and English on alternate weeks and following the service we meet for a cuppa in order to arrange the next service and create/collect any new materials.

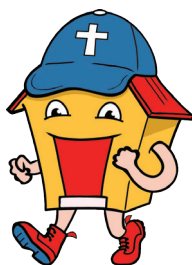
It's such a pleasure to see the childrens' responses and one member of staff has said she finds peace and inspiration to face the day as a result of our services.

We only have ten members at Bethel PCW at Newcastle Emlyn- each one on his or her pension! But being able to co-operate with the church on this scheme has created a new fellowship amongst us, and bring two congregations closer together.

Why don't you give it a go- you will discover the pleasure of seeing the response of children, who no longer attend Sunday school, to the Book.

Mari Wyn, Bethel, Newcastle Emlyn





DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT STEP?

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