

*The Diocese of Swansea and Brecon*



*No. 103*

*Easter 2024*



***From the Editor: Chancellor Brian H. Jones***

***Dear Friends,***

The picture *Wimen at the Tomb* by Irva Martin 1843 shows Mary Magdalene and the other women at the Tomb of Jesus early in the morning on the third day. They have come to anoint the body of Jesus for burial. The fact that they are there shows the resilience of the women in the group of disciples, their male counterparts are still in the safety of the Upper Room. They find the tomb empty, the body gone, and the angel with the message He is Risen. They return mystified to the Upper Room to tell the others what they have seen. Mary Magdalene stays in the Garden and later Peter and the Beloved Disciple visit the tomb and go in and they see and believe.

The resilience of the women at the tomb is reflected down the centuries of Christian history in the witness of women to the Resurrection in the Church and in human society. Pope John Paul II in a Letter to Women of the World marking the United Nations Day for Women of the World June 29, 1999 (I still have a copy) writes ‘*thank you consecrated women following the example of the greatest of women Mary, the Mother of Jesus..... You help the Church and all mankind to have a special relationship with God.*’

In the Church of today women both ordained and lay witness to the faith that is theirs in the care of their families, their outreach into society seen in their work in areas of need and deprivation. But such activity applies to women of all faiths and none. If we look at areas of conflict like Gaza and Ukraine we see there the struggle that women have to feed and protect their children. In this way they emulate the women of the New Testament as seen in the picture.



Paula Gooder, Canon Chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral has recently published ‘*Women of Holy Week*’ in which she looks at the nine women named in the Gospels one for each day from Palm Sunday to Easter Day and the final chapter on Ascension Day. A lovely book for Holy Week meditations available in Amazon and most bookshops. We look forward to Easter Day as we reflect on the women at the tomb and the role of women in the contemporary world.

***Wishing you all the Joy and Peace of  
Easter.***

***Brian.***

# FAMILY NEWS

*We send our congratulations and best wishes to:*

- Philip Morgan on the carving and supplying of Bishop Dorrien's Crozier



Ordained in Swansea and Brecon in 1978 the Revd Philip Morgan, brother of Barbara Edwards left the diocese in 1984 after serving in various parishes in the diocese. Philip has served most of his ministry in the Diocese of Northern Indiana and the Diocese of Virginia in the USA. Now retired and resident in the Diocese of Eau Claire in Wisconsin, Philip has enjoyed woodworking since his teens. The crozier is made from American red oak with a Celtic cross incorporated into the design, and its handmade case.

The crozier is a gift from 3 clergy friends, Canon Keith and Mrs Mary Evans, Canon Tim and Mrs Mary Williams and Canon Rowland and Mrs Barbara Edwards

*We send our best wishes and prayers to those who have been unwell recently. A number of us have been attending Clinics etc recently and we include them in our prayers*

## **IN MEMORIAM PATRICIA JENKINS**

Patricia was born and brought up in London, but spent her student days in Australia where at the University of Sydney she took her qualifications to become a Librarian.

On her return to London at All Saints Margaret Street she renewed her friendship with David Jenkins, married and later moved back to David's home town of Brecon. They lived quite near the Cathedral in County House, David as an Architect and she in the Library.

Ordination followed for David and parish postings to Merthyr, Llanfaes and Pontardawe..then to Spain to the chaplaincy at North Tenerife.

Upon retirement they had a place in Swansea Marina and Patricia lived there and David visited from their place in the sunshine.

She worshipped at St Mary's and was an important and loved member of the congregation, involved with all the many activities of this city centre church, a member of the PCC, a Eucharistic minister, active with the MU a generous supporter of the Brunch club for the homeless and needy. Patricia liked her visits to the retirement fellowship meetings, seeing friends and enjoying the talks.

Sympathy goes to Father David, her daughter Megan, son in law Colin,...and their dog Ruby, who loved visiting the Marina. May she rest in Peace and rise in Glory/ *Stephen Ryan*

## ***In Memoriam Alan Charters, Priest.***

After graduation from Trinity Hall, Cambridge he moved on to Lincoln Theological College for his Ordination Training. He was ordained Deacon in that diocese in 1962 and Priest in 1963 and served his title in St. Mary and St. James, Grimsby. In 1965 became Chaplain of Elizabeth College, Guernsey and so began the ministry of the Priest/Schoolmaster. This was followed by further Chaplaincies in schools in Swindon and leatherhead where, ultimately he became Deputy Head. His last school appointment was as headmaster of King's School, Gloucester. In 1987 he was appointed rector of the Aberedw Group of Parishes where he had a happy and fruitful ministry and also involved himself in the life of the Diocese. He retired in 1992 and lived a while in Talgarth before having a brief spell as Parish priest in a parish in Brittany. Latterly he and his wife had moved to the South of England where he died. He was buried in Aberedw.

We send our sympathy and prayers to his wife and family, and commend Alan to the care and mercy of God as he continues his onward journey. *B.H.J.*

## ***The Retired Clergy Group***

The March meeting of the Group will be the Chrism Mass in the Cathedral on the Tuesday in Holy Week at midday. On April 9<sup>th</sup> our speaker will be Carolyn Harris the M.P. for Swansea East and a supporter of the ministry in St. Thomas. This will largely depend on the Easter recess in the House of Commons but it looks to be safe.

Recent meetings of the Group have been rather sparse for a variety of reasons, I have missed a couple of meetings because of hospital appointments, which are unavoidable. The intention is to look at how best the Group can continue to meet in the next session possibly with another format. *Ed.*

## Meditation on Holy Week

In the week leading up to Our Lord's Passion we read a great deal about the things people saw during those supremely important days.



*Israhel von Meckenem  
– The Kiss of Judas  
Iscariot – Coloured  
Engraving 15<sup>th</sup>  
Century*

Judas was completely taken aback by what he saw; he was angered by the spectacle of Jesus being anointed with expensive perfume by Mary in Bethany. It was then that he made plans to betray Jesus. And then in the Garden of Gethsemane it was by seeing the man Judas kiss that the soldiers knew who to arrest. What Judas saw and interpreted led him to an act of destruction because of his selfishness. He wanted Jesus to become what God had not intended. Judas came to see Jesus as a weakling; a disappointment who just sat around being pampered by a woman. Judas wanted to see some fight, some action.

This is a warning for us too; we may from time to time paint a picture of Jesus which suits us. We may want to make Jesus strong in a worldly way. When we are criticised or face ridicule our instinct is to battle with our cruel words. Our Lord's way is selfless and sacrificial, seemingly weak and foolish, yet ultimately, victorious and conquering.



*Duccio Di  
Buoninsenga 1255-  
1315 – Peter's First  
Denial*

On the night of the arrest, Peter denied ever knowing him. The cock crowed and Jesus turned and looked at Peter. That incident, that verse for me is one of the most poignant of all the verses in the Bible. Jesus turned and looked at Peter.

The night before, after the Last Supper, Peter, who initially wanted nothing to do with the foot washing said, "Lord not only my feet but also my hands and my head as well!"

As Jesus looked at Peter, He saw what He probably sees in each one of us; a person who is unpredictable in living the faith. We can be so enthusiastic in our promises to God and in our commitment to a life of prayer, worship

and Bible Study only to let it all go by the wayside. We have moments of deep faith when it suits us but when the going gets tough we could well face the test, as Peter did. And yet, Jesus did not give up on Peter. It was he, the one who had denied his Lord, who was chosen to enter the empty tomb first on Easter morning. It was he who became the first bishop of the church. So in that courtyard, on the night Jesus was arrested, Jesus looked at Peter and he saw more than someone who had given up on His Lord. Jesus still saw great potential in Peter. That look from Jesus gives us great encouragement and comfort; He can see great potential in us too, despite the many times we let him down by our action and our inaction.



*Duccio Di  
Buoninsenga – Jesus  
at Herod's Court  
(1310)*

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign' (Luke 23.8). Herod wanted to see a spectacular miracle. He wanted something to amuse himself with; he wanted Jesus as an entertainer in his court. He may have had plans to show off Jesus to his many visitors. Maybe Jesus could be someone to amuse his guests at a banquet.

And then, as Jesus hung on the cross some people in the crowd looked up at him, scoffed at him and urged him to save himself and perform one last spectacular miracle. They mocked him, saying, "He could save others but he can't save himself" (Matthew 27.42).

How demanding are we of Jesus? Do we look to him to do things we should not expect? Are our prayers full of requests to make our lives a little more comfortable? I suppose these prayers are ok but there's more to it than that, isn't there? Prayer is answered in the most ordinary of ways, not in the spectacular. Prayer is the way in which we can discover the mind of Jesus and share in his suffering as well as his power. It is a gift freely given and not to be abused. All we need to long for is the mind and the heart of the one who sacrificed himself for us.

*Dewi Roberts*

## *Chrism Mass Invitation*



### *Dear Brothers and Sisters*

Chrism Mass Invitation Dear Brothers and Sisters, I would be delighted if you could join us for Chrism Mass, which is being held in Swansea and Brecon diocese on the Tuesday of Holy Week (26th March 2024) at 12 noon. During this service, priests, deacons and representatives of the entire diocesan community gather with the bishop, who blesses the Holy Oils for use in the coming year - oils of sacred Chrism, oil for the sick and oil for catechumens. The Chrism Mass reminds us of our oneness in Christ through Baptism and its holy anointing, made possible by the ministry of the bishop, priests and deacons. The Chrism Mass is also a key moment in which the unity, exemplified in the work and witness of bishop, priests and deacons is manifested and renewed, hence the importance of our gathering together as a collegiate. During the liturgy, the entire assembly will be called to renew our baptismal promises. As deacons and priests, we will renew our vow of obedience and our commitment to serve God's people. At the end of the Chrism Mass, the Holy Oils will be distributed and taken back to churches of our diocese for use in the coming year. Please bring your oil stocks to be refilled. We should especially hold in the greatest esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centred around this Chrism Mass in the cathedral church, knowing that the principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full and active participation of all God's holy people in our liturgical celebrations, especially in this case where we have the opportunity to gather together as witnesses to the saving grace of God in Christ, at the same Eucharist, in one prayer and at one altar. NB. This year, lunch will be provided after the service. Could you please indicate if you would like lunch along with numbers of those who might be joining you to give us an idea of catering requirements?

+ *John Aber*



### *Bishop John's Easter Message*

I have been reminded lately of the quote by The Rt Rev'd Nick Baines, the Bishop of Leeds: "But Christians are not driven by fear; we are drawn by hope". Of course, not all fear is bad; fear can be a good thing in its right place. It can caution us from overly rash actions, it can make us 'look before we leap' and consider well lest we cause injury to ourselves or others.

But then there is the fear that overwhelms us, that comes upon us with such force that we have no time to even consider to 'look before we leap', to make any kind of sound judgement. There is only time to flee, and then not always time for that. Like any journey we embark upon, when the path is already known to us, it is easy to bring to mind the best parts while the worst parts diminish in our memory. But I ask that this Holy Week we remind ourselves, that at this time some 2,000 or so years ago, the journey to the cross was being embarked upon in real time, and with it came real fear, paralysing some, propelling others. Fear in the days and hours leading up to the cross was real and palpable.

It is our desire, I know, to pray for and help in any way we can, those who live in such times today; for families who, in an instant, have been torn apart, displaced and put in fear for their lives, and who have lost their homes, livelihoods and all they have held dear and for those who have been overwhelmed by fear.

Can I thank all those who have responded to the appeal this Lenten tide for their generosity and support for people who are in such need at this time. And so, while fear in our world is real and palpable, we can still show that we are a contrary people. Through our witness and ministry we can be drawn by hope, drawn by a strength far greater than our own, to a place beyond the dread of the cross, that leads to a stone rolled away, an empty tomb and messengers speaking of life, not death. A place where our faith in a risen Christ overcomes our fear.

*Easter means our hope has found its resting place in life, not death.*

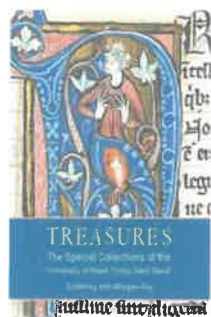
It is a risen Christ who tells us to "take heart! I have overcome the world".

*A very Blessed Easter*

+ *John*

4

## TREASURES' OF A COLLEGE LIBRARY



As an undergraduate at St David's College, Lampeter in the 1950's I frequently retreated to the 'old' Library where many of us found the atmosphere conducive to study. I never realized then that those ancient leather-bound volumes which surrounded me and stretched from floor to ceiling were such precious literary treasures. So I am grateful to be enlightened by a recent book edited by John Morgan-Guy: '*Treasures*': *The Special Collections of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David* where we are given a detailed account of some of these 'gems' of great historical and literary interest. Morgan-Guy has been associated with the College for many years serving as archivist, chaplain and at present Honorary Professor of Practice (Cultural History) and is well qualified to reveal to us the riches of what was once known as 'the greatest little library in Wales'.

The whole collection is now housed in *The Roderick Bowen Library and Archives* which was opened in October 2008 by Rhodri Morgan, the first Minister for Wales, and is situated in a separate building alongside the college library.

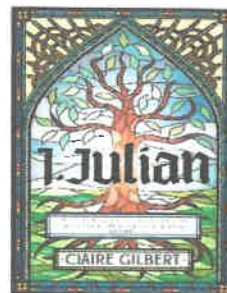
The library owes much to Thomas Burgess, Bishop of St Davids, the founder of St Davids College, Lampeter, which opened in 1823. Burgess was an enthusiastic bibliophile. He accumulated a vast library and was the donor of the first books to occupy the shelves of the college library. This collection of 9,000 volumes includes a 13<sup>th</sup> century *Bible* and a copy of Jacobus a Voragine's *The Golden Legend*, a vast compendium of saints' lives and readings, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1498. Burgess was fortunate to have many generous and influential friends who were eager to support the setting up of the college library. Among them Thomas Phillips, associated with the East India Company, donated a phenomenal 20,000 books relating to travel, botany, medicine and history, while another friend, Dr Thomas Bowdler, who lived in Swansea and is buried in the churchyard of All Saints', Oystermouth, gave a major collection of 9,000 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century tracts and pamphlets. This collection

included a first edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, a *Book of Hours* and a copy of Abraham Ortelius *Atlas* (1606) containing the first printed map of Wales, drawn by Humphrey Lloyd. These are just a few examples of what we find in the Lampeter Collection. The *Roderick Bowen Library*, in fact, contains thousands of volumes spanning seven hundred years.

John Morgan-Guy is to be congratulated as editor of this fascinating book in which we find a series of essays and articles by a team of scholars whose knowledge of the works it contains is unrivalled and is accompanied by fitting commentaries on many rare publications and pamphlets. The hard covered book, a contribution to the commemoration of the college's 200 year history, is beautifully produced and is full of stunning colour plates and superb photographs. It is published by the University of Wales Press and is well worth reading.

Arthur Howells

### *I Julian Claire Gilbert*



*I Julian* is the fictional autobiography of Julian of Norwich in which Julian reflects on *The Revelations of Divine Love* the first writings by a woman in English. Details of her life are little known, and Claire Gilbert has written an autobiography based on known facts. After her marriage the plague hit fourteenth century England and she subsequently lost her husband and daughter. Eventually she herself contracted the disease and it was during her illness that she had the visions of the Divine Love.

After some time linked to a group of nuns in Norwich she became an anchorite and her anchorage was attached to a church in Norwich. She had a servant who cared for her, a window into the church which enabled her to receive the sacrament and to share in the Mass. Another window opened into the garden where she was able to talk to people who came for counselling. Holy Church, as she called it, was suspicious of her writings and was closely watched for heresy.

Claire Gilbert suffered from cancer, and during her treatment felt very close to Julian and was inspired to write the autobiography. Her doctorate thesis was on Julian of Norwich so she was familiar with her writings. She is interviewed on YouTube which is worth watching, and the book is to be recommended. It is available on Amazon and other bookshops. **B.H.J.**

## *Curates of Sketty Remembered.*

Fred Cowley, in his outstanding history of St Paul's Church, Sketty, published in 2001, pays little attention to the curates of the parish. Even in an appendix listing the curates the name of one, Ion Davies (1954-56) is missing. In many cases the curates were the workhorses of the parish, and Ron Lloyd remembered having to give details of the forty house visits he had to make every week, and how each evening was filled in with some parochial activity, such as the choir, bellringers, or the women's meetings. The incumbents visited the wealthy by and large and ensured they themselves preached at the better attended morning services rather than the curates.

My own memories of these curates date back to the time in which I joined the church choir in 1951, until I left the area upon my ordination at Llandaff Cathedral in 1968. The earlier ones I didn't know very well, but some of the others became close friends. My family often recollected some of the earlier curates, many of whom were involved in the Sketty Church Players, where my uncle Frank Reed served as producer. Norman Parcell (1909-24) later became a much loved but eccentric headmaster and proprietor of the Brynterion Preparatory School, near Bridgend; John James Absolom Thomas unsuccessfully tried to convince my uncle's wife that there was a life after death, and Henry Nicolas Hancock, 1939-45, had my mother as one of his Sunday school teachers, officiated at her marriage and baptised myself and my twin sister. He later went on an exchange visit to a parish in the United States, writing an account of his experiences in his book *Transatlantic Exchange* of 1951. He eventually settled in the United States, becoming dean of Minneapolis. His book, "Red Letter Days," published by Longmans in 1966 has served myself and many other clergy with thoughts and addresses for those particular days!

Meredydd Howells, 1945-54, served under three incumbents: the scholarly Joseph Gwyn Davies, later dean of Monmouth, who according to my mother spent most of his time in his study; John Cyril Hill, whose ministry became highly acrimonious due to his high church views and ritual; and upon his almost forced resignation Harry Craven Williams, vicar from 1950-58. Meredydd took over the leadership of the junior Sunday School from Mr Hancock, but I have the impression he provided a sheet anchor for the parish in those difficult days under Mr Hill and held it together as far as he could. He was well loved by the parishioners and when he left for his own parish of Llanmadoc with Cheriton his over-large vicarage (he had moved from a two bedroom flat) was furnished with the surplus furniture of his Sketty parishioners. I remember the Sunday after the death of George VI when he hesitated in the versicle "God save the [King] Queen" to the amusement of us choirboys. He later became an incumbent in the diocese of Blackburn but seems to have retired in his mid-fifties.

His successor Johnston ap Llynfi Davies, known as Ion, 1954-56, son of a celebrated Congregational minister and Welsh writer, met Bishop John Mort, whose family came from Sketty, when Harry Williams invited him to preach at St Paul's. The bishop was then bishop of Northern Nigeria, and persuaded Ion to serve in his diocese. He did so for a number of years, and eventually became chaplain of Broadmoor.

After serving as a school chaplain in a parish retired as a chaplain on the Costa Blanca.

Ronald Lloyd followed him, and is still fondly remembered by my generation for his work with the youth, his occasional involvement in the All White's rugby team – when he played foul the announcer declared that the try had been won by THE REVD Ron Lloyd – and his good humour, shown when he played the part of a village yokel in some play at the Steward Hall. The audience burst into laughter when he appeared. He left to become curate of St James's Church when Harry Williams became vicar of Swansea, regarding him as the best trainer of curates he had known, but he remained for a year with the new incumbent of Sketty, Garfield James. At that time Ron had a strong Welsh accent, and having preached on divorce, Garfield asked him who was this Dai Force he was speaking about from the pulpit, and sent him to the choir precentor, Lionel Rowlands, for elocution lessons. Ron after serving a Worcestershire parish became chaplain of the Dragon School, Oxford, besides acting as chaplain to a number of Oxford colleges, being possessed of a fine bass voice, and later became precentor and chaplain of Christ Church College. As precentor he was advisor to the college on its patronage, and would visit the vacant parishes and meet their parochial church councils to ascertain their views. He told me how he proceeded. First he would ask what kind of man they wanted. As each requirement was offered he would repeat it, and write it down in a notebook. Most of course desired a cross between Jesus Christ superstar and superman. Asking if their list was complete, he would declare that while they had a large number of men who wished to have a Christ Church living – as the college was generous to its incumbents – none had the attributes they required. Going through the list again he would add his own comments. If they wanted a non-working wife he would ask how much they were prepared to pay her, and so forth. Ron later moved to two Cotswold parishes.

Samuel Rhys Griffith was the son of a Breconshire solicitor, I believe, and a graduate of Lampeter and Cambridge. He became the junior curate and Ron the senior as a new daughter church had been opened at Tycoch. I remember how Ron assembled the youth club of the parish and told us to respect the new curate and not play the tricks on him as we had on himself. Sam was rather sensitive. The custom was to retain the cremated remains until a suitable number had accumulated to proceed to the area where these remains were buried, open the urns and shake their contents into the trench prepared for them. If there was a wind some of the ashes would be scattered, and descend on surplices and people. Sam would be mortified if this happened to him. I'm not certain what the problem was, perhaps a cancerous growth on his body, but he was told just before Easter he needed an immediate operation. Garfield went berserk and hinted Sam had planned this in order to have Easter free. Sam resigned on the spot, and took a post as a teacher in a prep school on Glanmor Hill and later became a master at Portsmouth Grammar School.

Another long serving curate of the parish was Dudley White, 1959-66, who was almost priest in charge of All Soul's Church, Tycoch. A local boy, his father had a shoe shop in the Uplands, and he married Patsy Stratton, a member

of the church congregation. Highly regarded, a good visitor, he also ran a Sunday discussion group in his flat in Queen's Road for the older youth of the parish, mainly sixth formers with some university students. I remember Judge Rowe Harding coming to talk to us, and no doubt there were other speakers as well. Like many other curates he served a Radnorshire parish – dead at forty, buried at eighty was the claim -, and one reason why the diocesan cricket club was so well supported was that when they played one of the English border dioceses their archdeacons would be there with their vacancy lists! Suffice to say Dudley moved to be vicar of Penyfael in the diocese of Llandaff and later vicar of St Jude, Swansea. To the consternation of many of his friends he was received into the Roman Catholic Church on his retirement, and they felt sidelined at his requiem mass and funeral as they remained in the congregation. His service in the Church in Wales was barely mentioned.

A nephew of the Revd Iltyd Jenkins, vicar of St Gabriel's, Swansea, a high church, John Alfred Morgan Jenkins, was curate of Sketty from 1962-69, and from Lampeter proceeded to Oxford where he took a fourth class in theology. A little remote, J.A.M. (as he was known) seems to have been based more in the parish church, but he continued with Dudley's discussion group which met in the attic of his first floor flat of the clergy house. He served for some years in Honduras, possibly under the influence of Bishop Binny Vaughan, bishop there from 1967-71, and later bishop of Swansea and Brecon. He was later vicar of West Byfleet in the diocese of Guildford, and died in that post some years ago.

Glyndwr Jones was the final curate of my time, serving from 1967-70, but I didn't know him very well, though he attended my ordination at Llandaff Cathedral in 1968 as a representative of the parish. After a brief time as rector of some Radnorshire parishes, he became a Missions to Seamen chaplain, eventually rising to become its general secretary and a chaplain to the Queen.

A later curate, Robert Paterson, 1973-78, was introduced by me to Garfield James as vicar, when he was looking for a curate, as Robert had had a rather difficult time as curate of a Manchester parish. Eventually moving to notable ministries at Llangatock, Gabalfa in Cardiff, and Cowbridge, he became officer for mission and ministry in the Church in Wales, before his appointment as chaplain to the archbishop of York, and his eventual elevation as bishop of Sodor and Man in 2008. This was at the time when Swansea and Brecon diocese was vacant, and Robert had been repeatedly asked to allow his name to go forward to the selection committee, but couldn't at that time tell them his refusal to allow this was because the news of his elevation had yet to be announced.

Harry Williams later became archdeacon of Gower, and many assumed he should have received a bishopric as he was a fine administrator and outstanding preacher. He was also awarded a military MBE for chaplaincy services in Egypt as he had inherited the work of Hubert Hughes, later vicar of Morryston, who had built a chaplaincy church and centre there but had been posted elsewhere before it opened. Hubert

always felt that Harry had received the MBE he himself deserved!

## ***Roger Brown***

### ***And who is my neighbour?"***

Chad Varah, the founder of The Samaritans, as it was originally known, was a clergyman. Since then clergy of different denominations have been drawn to be volunteers. People become Samaritan volunteers for all sorts of reasons, perhaps as many as there are volunteers, so this piece is about this particular priest/volunteer. It is a wholly personal reflection, personal about my promptings and about the path that led to my being Director of Swansea Samaritans.

I had been a volunteer at the Doncaster branch in the 1970s (I'm that old!) but Samaritans (no definite article now) in the 2020s is quite a different organisation. While our aim is still to prevent as many self inflicted deaths as possible, the focus has widened to provide emotional support to a wide range of callers beyond those who are suicidal. Indeed, the change prompted Chad Varah to disown for a time the organisation which he'd founded. Necessarily though, it has changed and adapted in response to social and economic circumstances: this has also led to its becoming more corporatized as a national institution.

So what brought me back to Samaritans after forty years and keeps me there? Most readers of this piece will know that I and Judith, my wife, were chaplains in HM Prison Service for twelve years. I was involved in one way or another with a few deaths in custody but one has stayed with me more than the others. A young man – he was twenty four - in HMP Bristol had hanged himself; although I remember the scene vividly it doesn't haunt me. What does haunt me, however, is telling his parents face to face what had happened. The prison Governor and I decided to inform his parents, who lived some thirty miles away, rather than ask the police to do it. Suffice to say that it was an uncomfortable visit. They were, unsurprisingly, numb with incomprehension. By the time of the funeral, however, which the parish priest had invited me to share, the mood of the whole family had changed sharply to raw anger and recrimination. The Governor sensed that there could even be violence and left the church. But by the end of the service there was calm and the man's sister, who had earlier been personally aggressive to me, put an arm around me and asked if I was alright. So it's the anger, the grief and the guilt of the bereaved as well as the actual loss of a life which impels me. A chance (?) encounter in Sainsbury's led me to make enquiries at Swansea Samaritans. The stranger whom I'd met became my mentor (and

and, even as Director, I still tap into her wisdom and experience.

If there is a stereotypical image of a Samaritan volunteer it is possibly of someone sitting at a telephone in the further reaches of the night, listening to a desperate and despairing caller who intends to take their life or is in the process of doing so. This is not an inaccurate picture but it's an incomplete one. In fact suicide calls account for only between a quarter and a third of all calls; at any time of day a volunteer might be listening to an addict of some kind, a victim of domestic abuse, someone in financial straits, a prisoner – the list is endless. And yes, we get abuse and sex calls as well. But most callers value the fact that we don't give advice or instructions, that we are confidential and that we recognise their human dignity by respecting their right to self determination. These days the volunteer might also be responding to an email or be involved with a web chat.

Even before the covid lockdown we didn't have many face to face callers because of our off-centre location. To compensate for that we try to do as much outreach as possible, taking our van, which can be used as a mobile f2f room, out to Carmarthen, Llanelli and, especially now, Port Talbot. We are already working out ways to be most accessible for people who live in the town and those who work at Tata or places which depend upon it for their livelihood. In addition we have a contract with GWR to be present at stations in the area, to talk with staff and passengers, and to provide listening training.

A different kind of outreach is to Swansea prison where we train selected prisoners to be Listeners, in effect Samaritans in prison. The Swansea scheme was the first of its kind in the UK, established by the then prison chaplain, Ted Hunt, a former Director himself, and the then Director, Joyce. The outreach is done by a small, designated – and dedicated! – team. Relations with the prison are mostly cordial and helpful. Mostly. The involvement matters greatly to me – well it would, wouldn't it – but I choose to stand back from it. I've done my time in prison!

In the wider life of a Samaritans branch there is necessarily a lot of back stage activity; potential volunteers have to be interviewed, selected, trained and supervised; existing volunteers receive ongoing training. All of these functions as well as the day to day running of the branch are carried out in addition to listening activities. As well as my role as Swansea Director I'm also on the small national quality assurance team which randomly monitors calls; I can safely say that the quality of response by Swansea volunteers is second to none and that my own listening has improved as a result of monitoring.

Samaritan volunteers have problems and become ill like anyone else; as well as ministering (and yes, I mean ministering) to our callers, we try to minister to each other in times of need and always if someone has taken an especially disturbing or distressing call. Indeed, Judith and I have ourselves experienced the care of our fellow volunteers recently.

That, then, is both how I came to be a Samaritan and why I stay and attempt to run the Swansea branch. That's my story. So why would an ordained person spend so much time and energy in an avowedly secular organisation? The irony is not lost of Samaritans being founded by an Anglican priest and bearing its name from one of Jesus's parables: it's fair to say that the organisation is non-religious rather than anti-religious – yes, I know it can be a fine line. What drives this volunteer is the second great commandment, Jesus's answer to the question, "And who is my neighbour?" Being a Samaritan volunteer is my attempt to respond practically to the second great commandment. It's an uncomplicated, even simplistic recognition that Christ died so that ALL might have life.

At the start of every shift I write three words at the top of my note pad: "Love, Patience, Understanding", and I place a small wooden cross on my work station. I will pray for callers, including the abusers and the sex callers when I reach home, or later in the day if it's been a night shift, 12 to 3 or 2-6. I'm content to be part of a group that doesn't so much save lives but gives callers time and space to save their own lives by giving them (back) the human dignity of making their own decisions. Do I routinely end a call with "God bless you"? No, I don't, but if I'm getting the appropriate signals then yes, I will declare a blessing. My personal imperatives as priest and Samaritan are to enable life and peace, to avert the grief and anger which I saw in that young prisoner's family twenty years ago. I haven't even told you his name. It was Peter.

*Peter Phillips*

**Retired Clergy Newsletter**

**Editor Chancellor Brian Jones, M.Phil.**

**125, Homegower House, St. Helen's Road.**

**Swansea SA1 4DW**

**e mail [b.h.jones@outlook.com](mailto:b.h.jones@outlook.com)**

**Please send suggestions, comments, items of news by 1<sup>st</sup> June for the Summer issue.**