

YOURS FAITHFULLY

March 2023

MA Office address

Mail: [office@cnb-parish.org.uk](mailto:office@cnb-parish.org.uk)

Tel: 01656 667690

Vicar

The Rev'd Maggie Thorne  
Leader,  
Ministry Area of  
Penybont ar Ogwr  
The Rectory  
Merthymawr Road North  
Bridgend  
CF31 3NH

Tel: 01656 652247

Mail: [maggie53thorne@gmail.com](mailto:maggie53thorne@gmail.com)

Sunday Schedule  
09:30, 11:00 & 6:30pm

Wednesday Schedule  
Please see detailed  
service schedule

Morning & Evening  
Prayer at  
8am & 7pm Monday to  
Thursday via Zoom

Please see detailed  
service schedule for  
dates, times and  
Churches

Please email, phone or  
request Zoom meetings  
and chats as you wish,  
but please note that my  
day off is Friday.

Rev'd Maggie Thorne

Please send any  
information for the April  
newsletter in to  
[mapenybontinfo@gmail.com](mailto:mapenybontinfo@gmail.com)  
by 15 March 2023.

Dear friends

It's March so it MUST be spring now and the temperatures SHOULD be improving. Let's hope so. And because it's spring, we know we're in Lent: the season for 'giving things up', but let me encourage you to think about it differently this year. Lent seems to prompt us to ask the question of others, 'What are you doing for Lent?', as if it's an individualistic thing. We should really not turn inwardly to ourselves, but begin with ourselves and see a transformed life in community and relationship, with God and with each other so that the question is rather, 'What are you **all** doing for Lent?'

For each of us who is serious about marking Lent well, the season begins with paying attention and beginning to make straight the way of the Lord by listening. This began on Ash Wednesday with our listening to the words of self-examination: 'We have not loved you...we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves...we have been deaf to your call....we confess our unfaithfulness, pride, hypocrisy and impatience...our self-indulgence and anger....our negligence in prayer and worship...' Lent is truly a time where we squirm at what we know are our failings and make reparation. If giving up chocolate, alcohol, or whatever helps you to do this, well and good, but you'll be doing this only for yourself. Collectively, perhaps we can give up, or take on, something else. The easiest thing in the world that we can do is to complain and moan and although there is plenty of opportunity for that in our current world and local situation, let's be counter-cultural! One year I was challenged by the Archbishop's Lent Book (when I was still in the Church of England) to give up complaining. Oh dear, oh dear. I'm afraid that lasted for about half a day. It focussed me though, and showed me how much the people around me were moaning and how much I moaned myself. It was the hardest Lenten challenge I've ever had. Think about it for yourselves. Maybe instead we could take on '**an attitude of gratitude**' and make a daily list of things that we can give thanks for. Once we make a start, (family, friends, faith, food, homes, security, birdsong, daffs....) things will snowball, I promise. I also promise that if we rise to the challenge we'll be much happier by Easter.

Lent Course

To help you adopt 'an attitude of gratitude', this year's Lent Course might be a gentle place to start. It's based on the film, 'Chocolat' (not the book!) and the course runs on Monday evenings at the Rectory, starting promptly at 7.30. I have a limited number of chairs, so please let me know if you'd like to join in.

*Every blessing  
Maggie.*



Inside this issue:

Service Schedule ..... Page 2

Collect and  
Sunday Readings ..... Page 5

For Your Prayers ..... Page 7

Green News ..... Page 8

General News ..... Page 11

## Services Schedule

Date	Time	Church	Service	Vicar
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> February (Ash Wednesday)	10:00am	Coity	Eucharist	Maggie
	11:00am	Newcastle	Eucharist	Tim
	7:00pm	Coychurch	Eucharist	Maggie
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> February (Lent 1)	9:30am	Merthyr Mawr	Eucharist	Maggie
	11:00am	Nolton	Eucharist	Maggie
	6:30pm	Zoom	Evensong	Maggie/Chris
Wednesday 1 <sup>st</sup> March	10:00am	Nolton Rectory	'Healing' Eucharist	Maggie
	11:00am	Laleston	Eucharist – Bilingual St David's Day	Mike
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> March (Lent 2)	9:30am	Brackla	Café Church	Pete
		Laleston	Eucharist	Maggie
		Pen-y-Fai	Eucharist	Tim
	11:00am	Coychurch	Eucharist	Maggie
		Newcastle	Eucharist	Tim
	6:30pm	Zoom	Evensong	Maggie / Pete
Wednesday 8 <sup>th</sup> March	11:00am	Newcastle	Eucharist	Maggie
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> March (Lent 3)	9:30am	Brackla	Eucharist	Maggie
	11:00am	Pen-y-fai	Non-Eucharist	Penny
		Nolton	Eucharist	Maggie
	6:30pm	Zoom	Taizé	Maggie / Chris
Wednesday 15 <sup>th</sup> March	9:30am	Laleston	Eucharist	Maggie

## Services Schedule cont...

Date	Time	Church	Service	Vicar
<b>Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March</b> (Lent 4) Mothering Sunday	9:30am	Brackla	Café Church	Chris
		Coity	Eucharist	Maggie
		Laleston	Eucharist	Tim
	11:00am	Coychurch	Family Service	Pete
		Pen-y-fai	Eucharist	Tim
		Merthyr Mawr	Non-Eucharist	Penny
		Newcastle	Eucharist	Maggie
6:30pm	Zoom	Evensong	Maggie / Pete	
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> March	10:00am	Coity	Eucharist	Maggie
<b>Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March</b> (Lent 5) Passion Sunday	9:30am	Laleston	Eucharist	Maggie
	11:00am	Nolton	Eucharist	Maggie
	6:30pm	Zoom	Evensong	Maggie / Chris
Wednesday 29 <sup>th</sup> March	9:30am	Laleston	Eucharist	Maggie

## Services Schedule cont...

Date	Time	Church	Service	Vicar
<b>Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April</b> (Lent 6) Palm Sunday	9:30am	Brackla	Café Church	Pete
		Coity	Eucharist	Maggie
		Laleston	Eucharist	Mike
		Pen-y-fai	Eucharist	Maggie
	11:00am	Coychurch	Eucharist	Maggie
		Merthyr Mawr	Eucharist	Mike
		Newcastle	Eucharist	Tim
6:30pm	Zoom	Evensong	Maggie / Pete	
Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> April	9:30am	Laleston	Eucharist	Stephen

Morning and Evening Prayer at 8am and 7pm, Monday to Thursday via Zoom  
**Please contact Rev'd Maggie Thorne** for the Zoom links you need.

Sunday clubs run at Brackla, Coity and Pen-y-fai.  
**Please contact Rev'd Maggie Thorne** for details.

Please note that the rota reflects both the shortage of staff and the rising cost of heating the churches.

Unfortunately, we have to be very mindful of our spending as congregational giving has reduced substantially over the years, especially since Covid. It should also be noted that when it comes to legacies left to our churches and because of the terms and conditions attached to them, approximately 98-99% of the legacy capital money cannot be spent. The capital is invested to generate an income which can then be used for charitable purposes for the designated church/old parish as per the donor's wishes.

If you have any questions concerning this, please contact the MA Treasurer, Sandra Arnott - [sandra.arnott49@gmail.com](mailto:sandra.arnott49@gmail.com)

## Collects and the Sunday readings for the month

Date	Collects	Readings
<b>Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> February</b> (Lent 1)	Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen	Genesis 2. 15-17; 3. 1-7 Psalm 32 Romans 5. 12-19 Matthew 4. 1-11
<b>Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March</b> (Lent 2)	Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant that all who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, may reject those things that are contrary to their baptism, and follow in the way of Jesus Christ our Lord; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.	Genesis 12. 1-4a Psalm 121 Romans 4. 1-5, 13-17 John 3. 1-17
<b>Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March</b> (Lent 3)	Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.	Exodus 17. 1-7 Psalm 95 Romans 5. 1-11 John 4. 5-42
<b>Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March</b> (Lent 4)	Lord God, whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.	1 Samuel 16. 1-13 Psalm 23 Ephesians 5. 8-14 John 9. 1-41

## Collects and the Sunday readings for the month cont...

Date	Collects	Readings
<b>Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March</b> (Lent 4) Mothering Sunday	God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen	Exodus 2. 1-10 <i>or</i> 1 Samuel 1. 20-28  Psalm 34. 11-20 <i>or</i> Psalm 127. 1-4  2 Corinthians 1. 3-7 <i>or</i> Colossians 3. 12-17  Luke 2. 33-35 <i>or</i> John 19. 25-27
<b>Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March</b> (Lent 5) Passion Sunday	Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen	Ezekiel 37. 1-14 Psalm 130 Romans 8. 6-11 John 11. 1-45
<b>Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April</b> (Lent 6) Palm Sunday	Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.	Liturgy of the Palms: Matthew 21. 1-11 Psalm 118. [1, 2,] 19-29  Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50. 4-9a Psalm 31. 9-16, [17, 18] Philippians 2. 5-11 Matthew 26.14 – 27.66 or 27. 11-54

## For your Prayers

### Please pray for:

Kath Shenton  
Fr David Lloyd  
Chris Merkins  
Rita Cooper  
Marjorie Reed  
Dilys Leyshon

and all who are sick whether in body, mind or spirit

### Baptisms

There are no baptisms this month



### Weddings

Please pray for those who are preparing for their wedding, including:

Diane Ward and Ed Pereira



### Please continue to pray for Ukraine

God of all people and author of peace, we pray for all who are involved in the current confrontation in and surrounding Ukraine. May the nations of the world, their governments and leaders base their decisions upon your wisdom in all that makes for peace. Loving God, we recognise that conflict brings tragic loss for all involved, and so we pray that eyes and hearts may be opened to those things that unite us in our common humanity.

At this time of fear and tension, we pray for your beloved children; that they may know a de-escalation of fear and threat, which would enable them to live in peace and dignity.

We pray for a longed-for restoration of tranquillity in Ukraine.

Lord, we recognise that prayer is a privilege and the responsibility of each one of us; and so we hold in our hearts this situation, its context, and the future, secure in the love shown for all people through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen



### Ministry Area Prayer

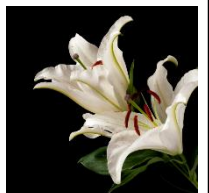
Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity to work together as a Ministry Area. May we engage with each other with faith and encouragement and manage each situation with wisdom and mutual respect. May we serve with integrity, creativity and purpose and speak with openness and gentleness. May we offer our gifts, time and finances with generosity and face each challenge with courage and the desire to grow through it. May we all be drawn deeper into our relationship with you and be known as your disciples. Help us to tell our joyful stories, increase our capacity for good and extend your kingdom in this place. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

### RIP:

Derek Marks  
Roy Davies  
James Tonner  
Joan Marsh  
Margaret Jones

Ken Williams  
Fred Custerson  
John Hek  
Michael Rees



May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and rise in glory.

Amen.

## Eco Church news

### Giving something up for Lent

The Lenten 40-day period before Easter gives us the opportunity to reflect on the practice of fasting and commit to giving up something that brings a real benefit to nature and helps address climate change. Below are some changes you could make that will help the environment. Take time to pray, reflect and consider these options – pick one or two or however many you'd like (you never know the changes might just stick!)

**Go plastic free.** Even if you can't become totally plastic-free, make it your goal to at least reduce your use of plastic. Read Tom's month without plastic blog [here](#).

**Buy local or in bulk.** Hannah shares how learning more about our food system has impacted what her and her family choose to consume. Read her blog [here](#).

**Switch off from digital.** Explore technology-free times or areas of the house, switching to 'airplane mode' for the first hour in the morning and the last hour at night, 'switch off Sundays', reaching for your Bible over your device(s) and writing a list of outdoor things that you enjoy.

**Try a plant-based recipe or diet.** Start by cooking yourself vegan or plant-based meals once a week and take it from there. As time goes on, cook more vegan/vegetarian meals and try to eliminate as many animal products from your diet as you can. Explore tasty recipes with [Meat Free Monday](#) or read about Kayleigh's veganuary experience [here](#).

**Spend more time in nature.** With weekly themes, [these 'Get Outside in Lent' outdoor resources](#) profiled in our Eco Church resources will help you connect with God as Creator and celebrate his creation in different ways over the Lenten period.

**Change your method of transport.** How about [walking or cycling for repeated errands](#), choosing one day a week to walk, cycle or take public transport to work where you are able to. Read about how Paul and his wife, Tara are changing the way they travel (and more!) [here](#).

**Move your money.** Could you divest from fossil fuels and support a bank which invests in renewables? 'Good with Money' recommends some ethical choices [here](#) or for pension investments that help achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN in 2015 there's ['Make my Money Matter'](#).

**Boycott fast fashion.** Emily reflects on how our clothes can bring us closer to our neighbour and have a lesser impact on nature. Read her blog [here](#).

**Buy less or second hand.** Read [here](#) how mum of 2, Nic started with small changes: using Facebook marketplace and ebay more to invest in second hand clothing and toys.

**Become zero waste.** Slowly try to reduce your waste a bit every week. Consider giving a home-made gift instead of buying a present, upcycling items or looking at your food shop and seeing what items you could buy differently, spending a bit more on loose fruit and veg for example.

**Invite wildlife into your garden or church green space (with permission!).** Read John's tips on greening our gardens for nature's benefit [here](#). Where possible, invite and encourage others in your church community to be part of the journey, for example, planting seeds as part of the children's ministry or getting your church youth group to help build and stock up a hedgehog home.

**Grow your own.** Whether you have a garden or sunny windowsill, find out what you can sow and grow on a month-to-month basis [here](#). Read how Vishadhi is using her home-grown food to bless her local community and food bank [here](#).

**Take a step to save energy in your home.** From draught-proofing windows and doors to swapping your bath for a shower, [here's](#) a list of quick tips. You might be surprised at how many of these changes you've already made!



### Eco Church news

A Letter from Andy Lester,



A Rocha UK's Director of Conservation.

At the end of 2022 over 190 nations, including the UK, signed the Kunming-Montreal Protocol, committing governments to directly address the growing crisis facing biodiversity. The gathering was widely hailed as a landmark moment for nature.

At the heart of the agreement were four overarching goals focussing on landscape resilience and connectivity, enhancing biodiversity, equitable sharing of resources, and equitable access to financial support to restore natural systems. Specifically, the agreement has committed the signatories to ending the extinction of species, with a target of a ten-fold decrease in the rate of extinction by 2050. The protocol includes 23 targets which, if implemented, should achieve the overarching goals. The targets are admirably bold. Target two, for example, commits governments to protecting and actively restoring 30% of land and marine areas by 2030.

As the UK is one of the most nature-poor countries in Europe, the Protocol should be good news for our four nations. The reality is more complex. The UK government has indicated that by including all National Parks and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty, we are already so close to protecting 30% of our land and sea that the UK needs to take very little additional action.

Yet many of the UK's designated areas, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), are in such

poor condition that it will take a generation for them to recover. Other areas, such as our National Parks, are often over-grazed, over-managed and under-resourced. Without change in the attitude towards designated areas, reaching 30% *on paper* will make little difference to the rate of extinction in the UK.

Worse still, the UK government seems intent on reducing our environmental protections, just when the Kunming-Montreal Protocol suggests we should be tightening them. If the Retained EU Law (REUL) Bill continues its current path through parliament, then there is a real risk of important EU-derived environmental legislation being deleted entirely from the UK statute books, without replacement, by the end of 2023.

The picture is no prettier in the UK in relation to several other Protocol targets. Target seven, for example, commits governments to reducing the impacts of water pollution by 50% by 2030. But in the UK, unabated pollution of rivers and streams from sewage outfalls continues, and monitoring bodies such as the Environment Agency are chronically underfunded.

If global society achieves the goals of the new protocol, it will be a beautiful and life-giving gift to future generations. However, this will require most governments, including our own, to think and act very differently in relation to nature – and fast. This kind of mindset change is likely to require the voting public to push for it loudly and persistently.



### Eco Church news

#### Connect with God's creation over Lent (ideas from A Rocha)

As we begin the season of Lent this week, Lord, open our eyes each day to see something new and wonderful in your world, so we may choose to be more considerate towards your creation during this time of reflection and beyond.

**Week One - Bring nature into your home or garden.** What could you grow inside your home, in the garden or even at church? Plant a herb or flower as a reminder of our responsibility to steward God's earth. As you tend to this plant, prayerfully ask God how you might nurture nature better at home over the Lent period and beyond.



**Week Two - Connect with creation in a new way.** Time spent enjoying God's creation will help set your mind and seek the things that are above. Bring your sketch or note book, your Bible, or whatever helps you connect with our heavenly Father. Or perhaps God is inviting you to just bring yourself (with some extra layers!). Note all the signs of the season. Use this time to reflect on the changing season and what we can be thankful for.



**Week Three - Discover the great outdoors with company.** Meet up with a friend or several for an extended or brisk wintery walk together. You could visit an outstanding area of beauty in the UK or keep it local and soak up the seasonal sights on your doorstep in your nearest green space. Bring along a notepad and pens to write about or draw something that inspires you in nature and share your ideas and reflections.



**Week Four - Plan a Wild Time!** Plan something **completely** wild in nature for later this year. Experience kayaking, wild camping, forest school, forest church... Make sure to take the opportunity to **really** enjoy what nature has to offer beyond Lent. Break out of your normal routine and join a volunteer work party or take to the water for wild swimming. Whatever you do – do something different and have fun!



**Week Five - Join us to protect and restore nature together.** How can we make small changes in our everyday lives that can make a big difference to others and for your world? Contribute to positive change as part of an A Rocha UK community, as a church (Eco Church) and as an individual or family (Wild Christian).



**Week Six - Be still in nature.** During Holy Week, find a quiet spot outdoors and reflect on what Holy Week means to you. Surrounded by the beauty and creativity of nature, the shortcomings of humanity and our need for repentance are often clearer, but so also is the power and timelessness of God. Bring before him your own concerns and the needs of the natural world. Continue to pray with us via our weekly prayer diary at: [arocha.org.uk/get-involved/pray](http://arocha.org.uk/get-involved/pray)



**Easter Sunday - The Easter hope of reconciliation is good news for all.** May we celebrate anew Christ's commitment in relating to his creation; that the Godman Jesus would enter into the deepest pains and realities of the flesh in order to restore the relationship between Creator and creature. By this restorative work all creation is reconciled to its intended delight, finding peace and mutual flourishing.



## Travelling to different churches within the M.A.

I'm a Coychurch church goer at heart but when Rev Maggie said the Wednesday services were stopping for a while due to several reasons, she asked if we would like to go to other churches in the M. A. on a Wednesday morning.

Three of us—Jayne (me), Sandra and Penny thought we would not be the Travelling Willberries but the Travelling 3. I was going to be chauffeur as Sandra and Penny don't drive and we would go to different churches and meet others.

So far, we have been to Coity twice and we were made welcome and once to the Rectory in Nolton...this was a lovely service and we met three ladies from Nolton and Coity and again made welcome.

We will have to travel over the next couple of weeks to Newcastle, Pen y fai, Laleston and Merthyr Mawr churches in our Ministry Area. Long may it last.

Jayne .....  
Coychurch church.

## Update on Vacancy:

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023 the vacancy for a new incumbent in the West End of the Ministry Area (i.e. Laleston, Merthyr Mawr and Pen-y-fai) is being re-advertised in the Church Times for 4 weeks.

Please pray for some enquiries or applications as there were none the last time.

## Ministry Area Annual Vestry Meeting :

The Annual Vestry Meeting of the Ministry Area will be held in Nolton Church on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April following a Ministry Area Eucharist starting at 10:00am.

The AVM will present MA Annual report and re-elect or appoint Ministry Area Council members, which has to be completed annually, and consider any other matters which have been raised in advance. All members enrolled on the Ministry Area Electoral roll can stand for election and vote on any issues at the AVM .

The Electoral Roll was renewed last January 2022 and is current for 5 years. Forms are available in the churches for anybody who is not currently enrolled on the Electoral roll to apply to be added.

Thank you  
Stuart Davidson MAC Secretary

## Giving:

For details on how to give, please contact Sandra Arnott (Treasurer to the Ministry Area) [sandra.arnott49@gmail.com](mailto:sandra.arnott49@gmail.com) or 862211.

Also, here is the link to our easy-to-use online Campaign Page: [MA Penybont ar Ogwr Donation Page](#) or scan the QR code above with your smart phone or tablet. For your interest, there's also a card reader in church, allowing you to donate via debit/credit cards.

**Please be as generous as you possibly can in your giving as we are very worried that with escalating fuel costs, the Church might be affected detrimentally yet again.**

## Pilgrim Course:

The Pilgrim Course will run via Zoom on:

26 February at 5.00pm –

please use the same zoom link as evensong which will be sent out every week.

The course gives an opportunity to explore the Christian faith with a little bit of Bible study thrown in and gems to reflect on from the saints of the past and the present.

If you'd like to join the group or become one of the pilgrims, and would like more information, please contact Rev'd Maggie Thorne.



## Lent course:

The Lent course will be run at 7:30pm at Nolton Rectory on Mondays during lent on the following dates:

20, 27 February, 6, 13, 20 & 27 March 2023

It will be based on the film *Chocolat* (released in 2000 – directed by Lasse Hallström) which will be shown on the 20<sup>th</sup> February.

Please email Maggie to reserve your seat.



## Jazz Concert - update:

A wonderful evening of music at the recent Jazz concert on the 29<sup>th</sup> January in aid of the Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Total raised was £320.

Thank you to all those who attended and supported this.





### Ministry Area news

The most recent meeting of the MAC was held on 7<sup>th</sup> February when we welcomed Ian Hibble and Simon Buckley to the group. Ian sits as a representative to the Diocesan and the Deanery Conference and I'm sure will be an asset to the work of the Ministry Area Council. Simon was welcomed as an observer while considering an invitation to join the council. We sincerely hope he will join us in due course. Welcome both. We owe our thanks to Paul Fenney who is retiring as a council member after providing very valuable service during the Transition stage of the Ministry Area. Thank you Paul. We wish you well with what ever you do next.

A date for our Annual Vestry Meeting was agreed Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April at 10:00am in Nolton. More details will follow in due course. EARLY WARNING, please remember that this is the meeting at which we confirm or reappoint the various positions on the Ministry Area Council. Should ballots be required to fill positions you can only cast your vote if you are entered on the electoral register. The register, as compiled last year, still stands but you can add your name to it this year by filing in a registration form and passing it back to your church rep. The registration forms will appear in each church soon. There will also be nomination papers for the various positions available as necessary.

Our safeguarding officer, Helen Harrison, reminds us that in order to comply with regulations you should complete part A and B of the safeguarding training if you are involved in any form of volunteer activity work on behalf of the Church. This applies to all aspects of volunteering which may bring you into contact with the public including organisations such as schools, youth groups, etc as well as more general contact such as meet and greet etc. Please ask if you need more information.

I am happy to report that the advert to appoint a priest to the area has appeared in the Church Times. We pray for a positive response this time round and hope that interviews could take place in mid-March.

Best wishes. Andrew Dix, Lay Chair.

### Bridgend County Borough Council News

#### Council Tax Reduction Scheme agreed for 2023-2024

Bridgend County Borough Council has agreed to adopt a Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023-2024, which includes a discretionary element to ensure eligible residents can receive as much support as possible.

Council tax reduction provides assistance to those on low incomes, who are liable to pay council tax. Residents who are struggling to pay bills such as this, are encouraged to contact the council for an assessment to see if they qualify for any support.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme has been developed by Welsh Government and local authorities are required to include several mandatory elements and to adopt any discretionary aspects by 31 January 2023.

Welsh Government have not made many significant changes to the required elements and depending on individual circumstances, eligible residents can still claim 100% council tax reduction. The new scheme will begin on 1 April 2023.

The changes set by Welsh Government include:

- Protection for hosts who are part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- Ukrainian nationals are now eligible for council tax reduction if they meet the criteria.
- European Economic Area (EEA) citizens, who are now subject to immigration control, are no longer eligible to be included in the scheme.

The council has also agreed to include a discretionary element to its Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which will see War Disablement Pensions and War Widows Pensions disregarded when calculating council tax reduction entitlement. This is expected to cost the council around £700,000.

Councillor Hywel Williams, Cabinet Member for Resources, said: "I welcome the approval of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023-2024 and it's pleasing that the maximum level of support remains at 100% for eligible claimants, particularly during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. I would like to remind residents that the council are here to help. If anyone is struggling with their council tax bills, they should contact the council to find out if they are eligible for any support."

[Further information on Council tax reduction is available on the council's website and residents can also make an application online.](#)



### **Bridgend County Borough Council News cont.....**

#### **Cabinet Members discuss Medium Term Financial Strategy**

Bridgend County Borough Council's Cabinet met recently to discuss the authority's proposed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023-24 to 2026-27.

Following on from the meeting of Cabinet, the strategy will shortly be undergoing further scrutiny by cross party councillors ahead of it being presented to full council on 1 March 2023.

Outlined in the document is a financial forecast for 2023-2027 and a detailed draft revenue budget for 2023-24, setting out the spending priorities of the council, key investment objectives and budget areas earmarked for necessary savings. This year's draft MTFS has been significantly guided by the proposed objectives in the authority's new Corporate Plan, which will be presented to Council for approval alongside the MTFS 2023-2027 in March.

The Corporate Plan will be fully aligned with the MTFS including explicit links between resources and wellbeing objectives. Even though, by its very nature, the council is a large and complex organisation, offering multiple services to local communities and people, its key objective remains to work as one single organisation, avoiding duplication and double handling of data through sharing of systems and processes. 'One council working together to improve lives' is enshrined in the Council's vision.

Like many organisations, the council has suffered from significant cost pressures and loss of income as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, along with inflationary pressures as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, plus the impact of the cost of living crisis on both pay and prices, particularly for fuel and energy.

The changing economic climate during the financial year has been unprecedented; with rising inflation around the world, budget planning for the financial year 2023-24 is more uncertain and challenging than usual.

There are fewer opportunities to cut services in a climate that requires more support for our older and more vulnerable members of society with substantial increased demand for many services.

Local authorities get the majority of their revenue funding from Welsh Government through the Revenue Support Grant and a share of Non Domestic Rates. It supplements this through council tax collection, other grants and fees and charges. Council tax currently funds around 27 per cent of the budget, meaning that for every £1 spent on services provided by the council, only around 27 pence is funded from council tax. Based on the proposed net budget of almost £320 million, the strategy will include an initial proposal for council tax to increase to six per cent for 2023-24.

The council's Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Hywel Williams said: "The Medium Term Financial Strategy is very much a draft proposal at this stage. The proposal will undergo further scrutiny at a number of committee meetings later this month, ahead of it being presented to full council on 1 March. The scrutiny of the budget forms part of the overall budget planning process, along with the public consultation that is currently underway. The council's Cabinet is committed to keeping council tax levels as low as feasibly possible, recognising the impact of the cost of living crisis on households. However, it is important to recognise that inflation is currently running at a level of over 10 per cent and the council is facing unprecedented pressures in some services, as well as huge cost increases for amenities such as energy usage. We have also taken into consideration in this proposal that the most vulnerable members of our communities are eligible for additional support, such as the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and discounts on their energy bills.

We are still working through some of the additional cost pressures we face and, if at all possible, we will seek to reduce the proposed level of council tax further but the current proposals are consistent with the average increases proposed across Wales currently."

### **Bridgend County Borough Council News cont.....**

#### **Council approves plans to tackle empty properties**

Bridgend County Borough Council's Cabinet has approved plans for the authority to join Welsh Government's National Empty Properties Scheme, whilst proposals to introduce a council tax premium on long term empty properties were given the go ahead at full council.

Both plans are aimed at bringing more empty properties back into use and will help to increase the supply of affordable housing across the county borough. As part of the National Empty Properties Scheme, the council is now required to enter into a Service Level Agreement with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council who have been confirmed as the scheme's lead authority. There is also a commitment to match funding on a case-by-case basis to the level of approximately £124,000.

To qualify for the grant, a property must have been registered as 'empty' with the council for a minimum period of 12 months before the start of any works.

Aside from property owners, registered social landlords, local authorities and community housing groups will also be able to access the funding which will be used to bring these properties back into use as affordable housing.

The terms of the scheme include:

- Only one application per person
- The maximum grant per application will be £25,000
- Energy efficiency improvements will be a requirement as part of the works undertaken on the property
- A minimum 15% applicant contribution will be required
- Any other costs above the grant and contribution must be met by the applicant

Once the works have been completed, the successful applicant must then live in that property as their main and only residence for a minimum of five years.

The scheme will be fully operational from 1st April 2023; however, Welsh Government launched the scheme on 30 January 2023 to allow applications to be made prior to the start of the new financial year.

To further reinforce the council's commitment to bringing more properties back into use, it has also been agreed to introduce a 100% council tax premium on long term empty properties which will come into force on 1 April 2023.

Councils in Wales have the powers to implement council tax premiums on long term empty properties and second homes under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Any additional money raised through these charges will be used to support local housing needs.

Cllr Rhys Goode, Cabinet Member for Future Generations and Wellbeing, said: "When so many people are facing the very real threat of homelessness, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to ensure more empty properties are being brought back into use.

"We are desperate for more homes in Bridgend County Borough and we hope these measures provide both a carrot and a stick approach to encourage owners to bring their properties back into use for the benefit of the community."

### Bridgend County Borough Council News cont.....

#### £21m funding for community projects in Bridgend County Borough

More than £21m is set to support a range of community projects in Bridgend County Borough following a successful application to the Shared Prosperity Fund. The money has been allocated towards specific initiatives and includes schemes that range from the Great Glamorgan Way - a 270km network of 'green corridors' which will connect communities throughout the region - to funding for new tourism events, projects designed to improve adult literacy, a new local enterprise support programme and more. Around £8m of the funding will be used to establish a range of initiatives that will enable people to learn new skills, gain new qualifications and abilities, and ultimately find long term permanent work. More than £3.5m will be used to set up new centres of enterprise across the county borough, while just over £1m will support health, climate and economical projects to help develop stronger and more resilient local communities. A further £2m will be used for community capacity projects such as establishing a new third sector fund and extending grants in support of commercial properties beyond local town centres. Welcoming news that the funding has been approved, Councillor Neelo Farr, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, said: "This is excellent news and the £21m will be used to fund projects that deliver a wide range of positive outcomes for local people across all of the county borough, especially within our valley communities. Designed to replace European structural funds, the Shared Prosperity Fund is intended to support projects which boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards and to encourage the private sector to grow and create opportunities. It seeks to support projects which instil a sense of community, local pride and belonging, improve public services and empower local leaders and communities.

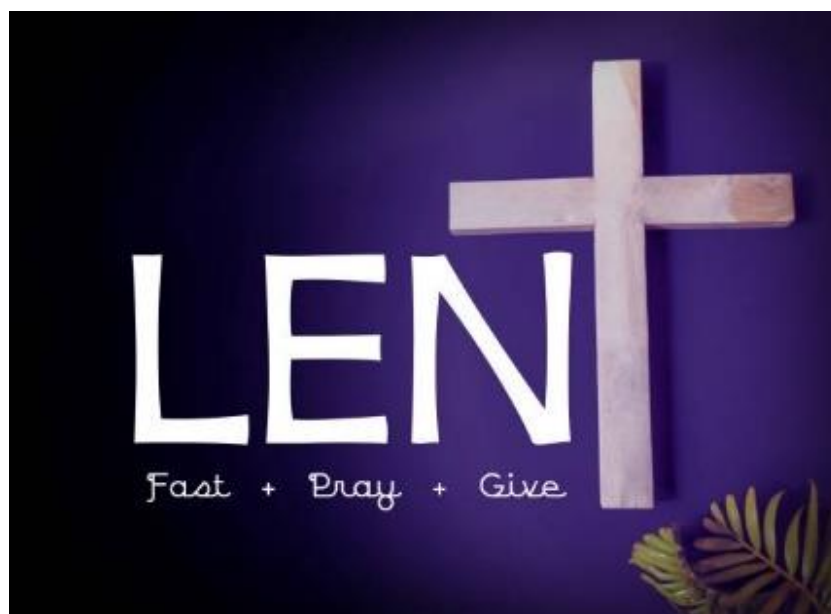
Opportunities to access the funding, which will be in place until March 2025, will be announced soon."

#### Bailey Bridge in Newbridge Fields to be refurbished

The council has arranged for the refurbishment of the decking on the Bailey bridge in Newbridge Fields.

Due to these essential works, the bridge will be closed from 7.30am - 4.30pm daily for approximately four weeks, starting on Monday 27 February 2023.

The council apologises for any inconvenience this may cause residents and visitors.



**Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, is the gift of Christ, the Lord**