

The Church of St John the Baptist Glyncorrwg

Parish Profile 2013



Mission

The role of the Church in the Upper Afan Valley is to bring the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit into the lives of all the population of the Parish, regardless of denomination, faith or lack of it, whether we meet in church through services, at moments of joy and sorrow, in shared activities and through faithful home visiting.

We have a particular concern with the young and the elderly in our community, through links with schools and care homes, supporting them through visiting and welcoming them into the church.

We extend our care to the wider world through covenant and giving, for example in supporting a young man in Uganda through a local missionary team.

We nurture our fellowship with Christians of other denominations, sharing worship with other local churches and chapels. Members of the Church have backgrounds in other denominations, and this enriches our worship and fellowship.

Introduction

Saint John the Baptist Church in the village and parish of Glyncorrwg has been the principal, and for centuries the only, church in the upper Afan Valley. Its history is very well established back to the 12th century, and there is convincing evidence linking it to the 6th century Welsh "Age of Saints" and its founding by a travelling evangelist, Corrwg by name, from the monastery at what is now Llanilltyd Fawr (Llantwit Major). For most of this time, the church served a population measured in the low hundreds, until the expansion of the coal industry in the 19th century when the population of the parish swelled to

over 13,000, and churches opened in Blaengwynfi, Cymmer, Abercregan and Croeserw to support the parish church. Since the 1960s coal closures, the population has reduced to just over 5,000 and St John the Baptist is again the only Anglican church in the upper Afan Valley.



The area of the upper Afan Valley has been characterised since the 1960s as one of social, economic and educational deprivation, and the economic decline of the last few years has exacerbated this situation. It was designated as a Communities First area under the Welsh Government development programme, is

part of the Western Valleys development area, and the European Social Fund and Regional Development Fund programmes.

Glyncorrwg Parish Church has been in an interregnum since January 2011, so is now in a third year without a parish priest. Nonetheless, the congregation, with the support of visiting clergy, three in particular, continue to be positive and to enjoy twice weekly worship (Wednesday and Sunday), support a choir and Sunday School, a Mothers' Union, and a range of parish activities, all described more fully below.

The Parish - location and demographics

The Afan Valley runs northwards from Port Talbot, and the parish covers the area from Afan Argoed Country Park and Dyffryn village in the south to Abergwynfi and Blaengwynfi in the north, and includes the villages of Cymmer, Glyncorrwg, Abercregan, Cynonville and the housing estate at Croeserw. Despite the distances involved, the congregation is representative of the whole area.

Health and employment

Around 5,000 or so people live in the upper Afan Valley. The main population centre is Cymmer/Croeserw, followed by Aber/Blaengwynfi, then Glyncorrwg itself with the smallest population of around 1,500. The population is settling around this level after a continuous decline following the closure of the coal mines, at which time there were around 13,000 people in the valley.

The legacy of the years of coal mining, however, although having disappeared from the landscape, can still be seen in the health of the remaining population. The Communities First profile of the area showed that there were fewer people than in Neath Port Talbot who described their health as being "good", and that there were significantly higher levels of chronic ill health in the upper Afan Valley than in Neath Port Talbot as a whole. This was carried over into employment opportunities, with significantly higher levels of people unable to

work through disability or ill health than was the case for Neath Port Talbot as a whole.

The proportion of people in employment in the area was consequently very much lower than for the Neath Port Talbot area as a whole, around one fifth lower.

These statistics need to be up-dated, as they relate to a period of five years ago, when the Communities First profile was prepared. However, it is not expected that the position of the area relative to the whole Borough Council area will have changed, and this is borne out by its continued designation as part of the Communities First "cluster" under the terms of the new Welsh Government programme.

The Local Economy - opportunities

Although local employment has been difficult to introduce and to sustain, there are some opportunities in the area which have been developed through local enterprise, based around the valley's natural environment and its potential to attract tourists through the provision of countryside activities.

These include :

- mountain bike trails in Glyncoirwg itself, and in Afan Argoed Country Park, with bike hire, camping and associated facilities for food (at Glyncoirwg, Cymmer's public house, and Afan Argoed Country Park);
- Glyncoirwg Ponds, providing game and coarse fishing for all levels of expertise;
- two industrial estates, one at Glyncoirwg concentrating on community industry;
- Bed and Breakfast and Guest House establishments to cater for visitors to the local activities, especially mountain biking.

Education

The parish contains one comprehensive school, Cymmer Comprehensive, and four feeder primary schools at Blaengwynfi, Croeserw, Cymmer and Glyncoirwg. The education structure therefore follows the pattern recommended in the recent Church in Wales Review, as a "ministry area". Previous incumbents have maintained strong links with the schools, and primary schools are regular visitors to the church. Glyncoirwg School recently carried out a study of the church for a film project, with the Churchwarden and Sunday School teacher visiting the school to be filmed answering questions, and the school visiting the church to film.

Local Facilities

There are four locally owned small shops in Glyncoirwg. In addition, there is a mobile butcher, greengrocer and fishmonger who visit weekly. There is an hourly bus service across four of the five villages, and a twice daily service to Abercragan.

There are two care homes for the elderly, with residents from the Afan and the Llynfi Valleys. They have received, in the past, regular visits including services and home communions.

The valley has an active and long-standing community bus scheme, and this is used every week by the church for Sunday service, as well as on other occasions as required.

The parish has much to offer tourists, with Glyncorrwg Ponds for fishing and recreation, Afan Argoed Country park and the many mountain bike trails in the forestry, and easier cycle and walking trails which make use of the old railway tracks. Glyncorrwg is in the top three locations in Europe for its mountain biking trails and associated facilities.

The Church and Churchyard

Over a hundred years old, there have been extensive renovations over the last ten years, continuing at the present time, so that the structure and condition of the church is basically sound. Decoratively, the church inside and out is very attractive, with good and colourful painted walls inside, lots of interesting features, and good catering and toilet facilities.



In the past decade, the church has acquired inside running water, which has enabled us to install a flush toilet, accessible to all, in place of the previous chemical one, and includes a baby changing area. We also have a new kitchen area in the north aisle with sink, seating area and electricity points for kettles, microwave, toaster etc. Hospitality has always been a strength in the parish, but we are now able to provide tea and coffee, without the use of buckets of water brought in from an outside tap.

We are currently focussed on the installation of a sound and hearing aid loop system. The church is not large, but not always easy for those with hearing difficulties, and the acoustics are not the best for the choir and congregational singing.

Access to the church is up a steep path, which makes it difficult for the elderly and disabled. We have recently installed a hand rail to ease access. We are currently investigating the availability of a disability scooter for those with limited mobility. There is a memorial garden in the churchyard for the burial of ashes, and an area alongside used as a car park, and occasionally by the choir as a summer barbecue area.

There is no parish hall attached to the church, but the parish is able to use the local authority owned Noddfa hall for coffee mornings and other events.

Church Services

There is a weekly Sunday sung Eucharist at 10.00am, and a midweek said Eucharist at 9.45am on Wednesdays. The last Sunday of the month is a family service, where the children of the choir and Sunday School lead part of the worship. We have a weekly readings and offertory rota, which include the children of the choir and Sunday School.

Home communion is provided by a licensed member of the congregation working with Fr Edwin Phillips who is the retired priest looking after the parish.

On Sundays we use the readings as set out in the Church in Wales three year lectionary, and on Wednesdays we read from the 1984 Church in Wales Book of Common Prayer. Our pastoral team is made up of two parishioners who are licensed to administer the chalice, although members of the congregation have been involved in regular services as well as special services such as the Good Friday Holy Hour.

Music and choir

Singing in church is accompanied by a euphonium, which is much appreciated by the congregation, although it ties up a fine singing voice. We have an excellent organ, which is itching to be played. We have a small enthusiastic choir with an age range from between 5 and 84 years. Members of the choir follow the RSCM programme, Voice for Life. Choir practice is held on Friday evenings from 6.00pm to 7.00pm. Sunday service settings are those developed some years ago by the Church in Wales and encouraged by the Archbishop, although judging by the reactions of visiting clergy, they are not well known. We use Mission Praise as our principal hymn book, although The Source, Hymns Ancient and Modern, Come and Praise, Carol Praise, Sankey's Sacred Songs and Praises and other hymn books also feature occasionally. Taizé chants and John Bell (Wild Goose Resource Group) feature regularly as good child-focussed short songs.

During the interregnum, the Choir's main focus has been twofold - to maintain sung services, and to develop the musical skills of the children in the Choir. We would like to think we have been successful in both.

Children's ministry

We have a small, but busy, Sunday School which meets for part of the Sunday Service, leaving as the sermon begins and returning for the Offertory. We have completed a number of projects, including craft work presentations of our studies to share with the congregation. These have included



mosaics (a copy of the mosaic under the altar at the Church of the Multiplication in the Holy Land), driftwood trees (a miracle tree, a prayer tree and a Jesse tree), a Flower Festival display of a Judean desert scene (which included a prayer pool, a miracle tree and a Stories of Jesus Book), a display of the travels of St Corrwg, and a published biography of his life. We have shared this with the other Curig churches in Wales and Cornwall, and the book is selling well.

Activities

During 2012, the church held a Flower Festival which involved many local groups including Glyncorwg Primary School, the local playgroup, local chapels, the Women's Institute, Glyncorwg Ponds Association and Senior Citizens Association as well as the Sunday School and other church groups. We also held a harp and organ recital, a Valley Praise service, and a Christmas sale. In 2012 we produced a recipe book 'Flour Festival', around the church's year, which has so far sold 250 copies. We always celebrate St David's Day and a number of us wear Welsh costume with pride.

Conclusion

This hastily prepared profile demonstrates that in a socially and economically deprived ex-coalmining area with high levels of unemployment and ill health, Glyncorwg church offers a spiritual and social experience which enriches the lives of those who take advantage of what we have to offer. Without a minister, the congregation has struggled to maintain contact with those unable or unwilling to attend church, but have nonetheless kept St John the Baptist as a welcoming, friendly and inclusive place of Christian worship.