

LINKS



**Newsletter and Magazine of the
Abergavenny Group of Methodist Churches
in the Hills and Vales Circuit**

A Christmas Creed



I believe in Jesus Christ and in the beauty of the gospel begun in Bethlehem.

I believe in the one whose spirit glorified a little town; and whose spirit still brings music to persons all over the world, in towns both large and small.

I believe in the one for whom the crowded inn could find no room, and I confess that my heart still sometimes wants to exclude Christ from my life today.

I believe in the one who the rulers of the earth ignored and the proud could never understand; whose life was among common people, whose welcome came from persons of hungry hearts.

I believe in the one who proclaimed the love of God to be invincible:

I believe in the one whose cradle was a mother's arms, whose modest home in Nazareth had love for its only wealth, who looked at persons and made them see what God's love saw in them, who by love brought sinners back to purity, and lifted human weakness up to meet the strength of God.

I confess my ever-lasting need of God: The need of forgiveness for our selfishness and greed, the need of new life for empty souls, the need of love for hearts grown cold.

I believe in God who gives us the best of himself. I believe in Jesus, the son of the living God, born in Bethlehem this night, for me and for the world.

Walter Russell Bowie

From the Manse

OUCH!!!!

It has been a tough seven weeks. I had no idea when I was at plan making in the middle of October that the pain in my stomach would land me in hospital for three days, then a sea of confusion about what was wrong and numerous relapses when I thought I was getting better.

I think I am now firmly on the mend.

However, in those few weeks of being off something wonderful happened. I got cards, phone calls, visits and e-mails. There were many people asking how I was doing. Jan was asked many times when she went to church about how I was. This was so encouraging and helpful.

There are certain marks of being a Christian; one of them is to care for one another. To be alongside when times are tough. Well you came alongside me and I am so grateful and thankful that you did and are doing.

Christmas is about looking after one another and blessing one another. I know there is all the commercialism and I am certainly like Scrooge and can happily shout, "bah humbug". Christmas though is about remembering that those who are saved have a bond in Jesus. For those who are outside the church, we have a passion and love that they also will know this saviour who loves them and they can be part of the church where we all should operate in the love of God. To be part of a family that is constantly growing (or having an attitude of wanting to grow).

In the covenant service in early January we will renew our covenant with God and one another. We are living stones built together.

So this Christmas let's all have the attitude of wanting to bless one another. Then in the New year have a resolution to work together and see God glorified whatever it takes.

Thank you and HAPPY CHRISTMAS and have an AMAZING NEW YEAR

Andrew Williams

Jan, Rebecca, Rachael, Sarah, Hannah



and Elissa

A POEM FOR ADVENT

Dark and dreary December days
Are cheered with the promise of light.
Here and there the first few Christmas trees
Have appeared to brighten the night.

Dark and dreary disastrous days
Filled the heart of mankind with fear.
Till a prophet proclaimed the message of hope,
That the birth of Messiah was near.

The people who walked in darkness then
Were no different from those of today
Except that we here have seen that light
And experienced its piercing ray.

Evil and darkness cannot stand its glare.
For it shows up each spot and stain.
“It’s all right for you in your comfortable churches,
But what have we sinners to gain?”

Yea, when I step out of my ‘comfortable church’
Into the gloom of the world outside,
I’ll remember that I too am a sinner
And have no cause for smugness or pride.

But Jesus has SHATTERED my darkness!
My sins are forgiven and gone!
My task is to praise Him and love Him,
Shedding light in a world gone wrong!

From ‘Down to Earth’ by Ruth Russell

Isaiah 9:2-3 (GNB) “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them. You have given them great joy, Lord; you have made them happy. They rejoice in what you have done”.



Hello again,

Well, further to last month's news the I.T. suite is still nearing completion. Joe has been very busy this month and hasn't quite managed to get it finished.

Everyone had a good night out at kingdom Live 8, a UK-wide gospel music tour that came to Wales for the first time this year. The music is hip-hop/grime - if you know what that is! - with a gospel theme. It turned out to be an epic evening of bangin' music and gospel proclamation!

Back to the more humdrum news! We served teas and coffees at the annual Keep Well This Winter Flu Jab event in the market hall and managed not to catch anything!! We also did the same at the Xmas Factor auditions.

Talking about the market hall we have a new volunteer who is going to take over running our market stall on Wednesdays, so **if anyone has any bric-a-brac they would like to donate this would be very welcome** and will give the stall a new lease of life.

Following the success of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the summer, Debbie and Geoffrey from the Covenant Players have very kindly laid on a series of drama workshops at Trinity Church and also a short performance specifically for 7Corners and friends, which was very much appreciated. They are excellent at what they do and this was a real bonus for us.

Finally, in view of the current economic climate and our shortage of funds, Ange and Jaya Deshpande (one of the trustees) attended a 'Funding Christian Charities and Churches' event this month and we hope to be improving our funding applications and feedback to donors by putting into practice the guidance received.

We wish you all a wonderful Christmas and we'll be back with more news in the New Year.

Judith E.

Castle Street Learning and Care Team

Report of the inaugural meeting which was held on Tuesday 1st November 2011 at 6pm:

Hilda Turnbull (Chair), Elaine Rogers (Secretary), Ken & Mari Jones, Peter & Pat Millward, Dollie Potgeiter and Diane Cooke were present.

Chris Everitt and Chris Holyfield sent their apologies.



Pat said that Friendship Club continues to thrive but that she is the only one with transport to collect those members who are less mobile. Funds are not sufficient to allow for provision of taxis each week. Hilda said she would ask for volunteers to join a rota of car drivers. Volunteers are also needed to join the Tuesday Coffee rota and a Manse Steward is needed to replace John Marsh who is stepping down after some years of faithful service.

Diane (Chair, Service Team) reported that the boiler at the Manse needs replacing; it has been inefficient for some time and has now been declared dangerous by the gas company. Diane will contact the Circuit Office. It was agreed that it is not acceptable for a family with young children and a baby to be without heating at the onset of winter. Hilda suggested that if the response is negative the Leadership Team send a robust letter to Circuit.

It was agreed that Hilda, Diane, Dollie, Elaine and Sallie meet as a core group to discuss ideas for prayer development outside services. Andy will be consulted before decisions are made and publicised. It is hoped that there will be prayer meetings which will appeal to everyone.

In the absence of a rep from Adventurers/ Sunday School, there was a discussion about how best to support them. Although Monkey Madness had attracted quite a few children, there has been no increase in Sunday School numbers. Volunteers for a support group will be sought. The team felt that, in the interim, Learning & Care should be the umbrella group. When Rebecca joined the meeting, later on, there was a quick resumé of what had been said. Rebecca will let the team know what support would be helpful and bring any ideas for future events for discussion at team meetings.

Mari queried how new Christians would be allocated to House/Cell groups. Would they form a separate group or be brought into existing

groups? It was suggested that this be discussed with Andy and the Leadership Team. Present members will be divided up on geographical lines.

Team reps: Service – Dollie; Evangelism – Elaine.

The Team liked the idea of a logo which can be developed into a banner. The one cobbled together with clipart was approved, although copyright must be checked. If anyone with artistic skills would like to develop the logo, that would be very welcome.

It was agreed that the meeting had been a successful beginning with everyone feeling they were getting to know each other better. The meeting ended as it had begun with prayer, placing everything in God's hands.

If anyone feels able to volunteer to help with a car rota, Adventurers, Tuesday Coffee or developing our team's logo, please do get in touch.

SHOE BOXES 2011

For



There was a wonderful response to the shoe box appeal again this year. 96 boxes were in the church at Castle Street for a service of blessing on November 6th. During the service prayers were said for all those unfortunate people throughout the world who have almost nothing – some not even a home. We are so rich compared with these people .

The boxes were collected from the church by a Samaritan's Purse volunteer driver and taken to a depot in Hereford to be checked and packed ready to be taken to their destination in time for Christmas .

A big thank you to all who made the effort, took time and so generously gave to fill these shoe boxes with gifts of love; also for the many cash donations made. These boxes are now on their way by road to Belarus where they will make many children very happy this Christmas.

N.A.P.

**Why does Andrew talk about change?
Is he saying that whatever has gone before is wrong?
Is the past worthless?
Does he want just young people?**

I want to try and address some of these thoughts and then finish with an article I found from a pastor:-

1. Why Does Andrew talk about change?

Change is not the right word, evolution is a better word. Or even growth and maturing. Faith has to be constantly growing, our understanding of God, worship, mission, evangelism, care, love, etc. I have a different marriage (better) than I did when we had been married a week. Why? I know Jan more and she knows me and we have grown together. That is also the same with our relationship with God.

One change I brought in when I came here was to have a Leadership Team to make sure there was more people involved in decision making. Furthermore four of the leadership team are heading up teams which I will rarely attend as I want them to grow in their leadership. I want to facilitate and encourage leadership.

Let me say at this point when talking of change, I love hymns and modern worship, I value the organ and guitar. It is not about changing worship but enhancing our approach to God in worship.

2. Is he saying what is gone before is wrong?

We build on the shoulders of giants. Any growth is built on a foundation of all those who have gone before. So Rod, Stephen, Michael , etc are giants that I and the other leaders in the congregation build upon. Each one brought their own gifts and personalities. I am not a Michael and Michael is not an Andrew. However, I respect the men of God who have ministered before me.

So what went before is right for that time. Some of it we hold onto, some of it we let go and recognize that was the past and we are in a different age and day with different needs and ways of presenting the gospel. I heard a story of a Methodist Church in Birmingham. The minister would preach in the evening by

candlelight. At the end of each page he paused while holding his next sheet up to the light and people sat on the edge of their seats to hear his next words.

We no longer have candlelight as times have changed. The gospel though stays the same.

3. Is the past worthless?

The past informs the present. We can read of the greats, Luther, Calvin, Gregory, Wesley and others. The past is not dismissed, there is so much truth, so much wisdom. We learn so much. The past is important. However, we are not bound in the past preserving a historic church service that is presented like it was in 1450. Our faith is a living faith and God continues to show us more and more.

4. Does he want just young people?

No. We are a family and all ages are valued. Older people are the bedrock and those who have sacrificed time, money and energy for decades and are to be respected, loved and honoured.

So let me share the article that I found and please read it in the light of what is above.

Blessings

Andy

Decisions Necessary for Change

When I walked into Maranatha Worship Center in Wichita, Kansas eleven years ago, there were many challenges, but I was fortunate to find a group of people ready to face those challenges. Soon I realized that while I was the 13th pastor in that church's nearly nine decades of ministry life, I was given a gift that perhaps none of my predecessors had received. People were ready, and even desperate, for change.

To achieve significant change in an organization, four questions must be answered the right way:

1. Do we know we need to change? John Kotter's book *Leading Change* tells us that step one toward change is a sense of urgency. Frankly, if there's not a strong reason to change, the people won't have the stomach for the journey. But urgency comes in two sizes—survival and mission. Survival urgency is the realization that if something doesn't change, our church won't be around for another decade. The threat of the doors closing will make most groups at least consider change. But mission urgency is even better. Mission urgency sees someone were not reaching or some critical need in our community, and charges toward change because we have to make a difference. In Wichita, survival urgency was on the table, and it brought a clear answer to question No.1 – YES!

2. Are we willing to change? Unfortunately, many churches who need to change lack the willingness to do so. Sure attendance is declining and ministries are shutting down 'cause the folks who once ran them now attend the church down the street. But, as long as the decision makers remain content with what they're "getting" at church, we don't need to make any changes. Tragic decision-making. To know change is needed and still be unwilling usually means the church has turned so inward that they will not risk their comfort for the mission Jesus gave. Thankfully, in Wichita, the people said strongly, "Show us what to do and we'll do it." Question No.2 – YES!

3. Do we know how to change? Now this is a bigger challenge and we'll likely need a couple of blog entries to fully unpack it, but knowing what to do is critical because you won't get many chances to fail with change. Change that's effective breeds more opportunity for change, but change that fails makes change the enemy. For now, let me just say that change has to fit a pastor's passion and ability to lead and also must connect with the people's capacity to fulfill. If you can't lead it and the people can't do it, you aren't going to succeed at change. I'll discuss this more in detail next week. In Wichita, we didn't succeed with every change initiative, but we were fortunate with enough of them to see strong momentum begin to grow. Question No.3 – YES!

4. Are we willing to do that? This is the commitment question. Once we have decided how we should change, we must be willing to pull the trigger. Many opportunities for a better future have been missed because we didn't do what we knew we needed to do. How tragic to be so close to the right step only to back away because of fear. It takes resolve to pursue change. Not everyone will like it! In fact, there will almost always be a loss when change occurs. You can't reach for a new day without lessening your grip on the old day. In Wichita, Question No.4 got a YES! too.

There's nothing easy about a change journey and you'll volley back and forth on your scale of hoped for success. So, how strongly you and your people can say "YES!" to these four questions will be critical to the energy and willingness with which they tackle the change journey.



Christmas Bells

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
Till, ringing, singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The Carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
And in despair I bowed my head;
'There is no peace on earth,' I said;
'For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!'
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
'God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!'

The Week Before Christmas

Was the week before Christmas and all through the school not a pupil was silent, no matter what rule. The children were busy with paper and paste; the mess that they made with it couldn't be faced.

The teacher half frantic and almost in tears, had just settled down to work with her dears, when out in the hall there arose such a clatter up sprang the kids to see what was the matter!

Away to the door they all flew like a flash; the one who was leading went down with a crash. Then what to their wondering eyes did appear but a green Christmas tree!
(To decorate I fear!)

When the teacher saw this, she almost grew sick. She knew in a moment it must be (the janitor) Old Nick! She ran to the door (all her efforts were vain) but she shouted, and stamped, and she called them by name;

"Now Tommy! Now Sandy, Now Judy and Harry! Stop Billy! Stop Robert! Stop Donny and Sherry! Now get to your places get away from the hall now, get away! Get away! Get away all!

As leaves that before the wild hurricane fly the pupils, pell mell, started scurrying by. They ran to the blackboard and skipped down the aisle; Their faces were shining and each had a smile.

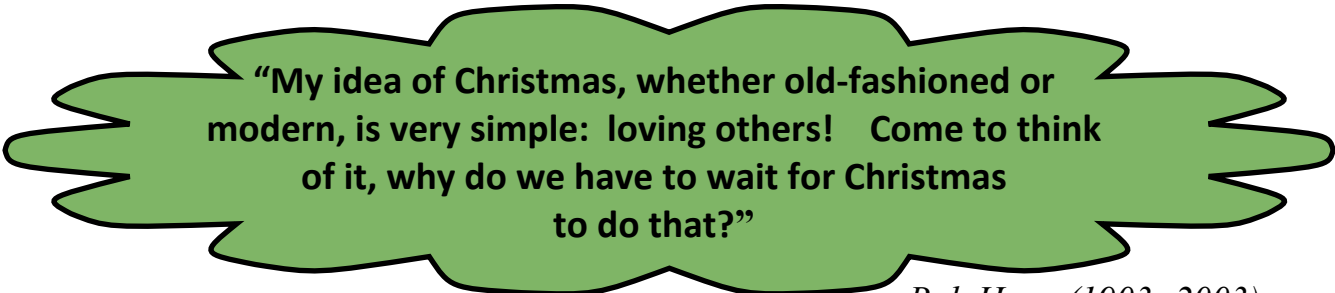
First came a basket of popcorn to string -then came the Christmas tree (menacing thing). As the tree was brought in there arose a great shout; the pupils were merrily romping about.

The state they were in could lead to a riot; the teacher was sure, if allowed, they would try it. Her nerves how they jangled! Her temples were throbbing! The rush of her breath sounded almost like sobbing!

The lines of her face were as fixed as a mask; it was plain that she didn't feel up to her task. The look in her eye would have tamed a wild steer, but the children ignored it; they did every year.

A tear from her eye and a shake of her head soon led me to think that she wished she were dead. She spoke not a word but went straight to her work, strung all the popcorn which broke with a jerk.

But at last it was finished and placed on the tree; then came the bell and the children were free! Their shrill little voices soon faded away and peace was restored at the end of the day. As she looked at the Christmas tree glistening and tall, she smiled as she whispered, Merry Christmas to all!



"My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others! Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?"

Bob Hope (1903 -2003)

Minutes of Meeting of the Castle Street Worship Group held at Castle Street, 7.30 p.m. on Friday 25 November 2011

Present: Peter Millward (*Chair*); Margaret Pipe (*Secretary*); Hugo Potgieter (*Senior Steward & Song Pro*); Pat Millward (*Door Stewards representative*); Alan Hall (*Organ*); Jan Williams (*Band*); Diane Cook (*Prayer Ministry*); Gwenllian Knighton (*Supernumeraries*); Chris Everitt (*L.P. on trial*)

Apologies: Marilyn Bailey (*Communion Steward*); Rebecca Williams (*Young Adventurers Group*).

Peter opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and read from Revelation chapter 5 from The Message, followed by prayer.

It was announced that meetings of the Worship Group will be held quarterly. A discussion of purpose and scope then followed and agreed it is to enable and encourage all forms of worship. We were informed that a budget is available if needed.

Tuesday midday service: Gwenllian agreed to continue arranging leaders for this, with communion on the 3rd week of each month. Gwenllian would like the front door of the church opened for this service on Tuesday if a key is available.

Early Sunday morning communion also mentioned. Peter agreed to meet with supernumeraries regarding use of SongPro for this service.

The meeting was informed that the time of the service on Christmas Day will be 10.00 a.m. with carol singing prior to this. Peter suggested that the lighting of the Advent Candles take place five minutes before each service at the same time as the cross light is switched on, so that the congregation will be silent and the organist will join others in the vestry for prayer.

Alan requested a copy of the new 'Singing the Faith' hymn book with music for the organ. It was noted we must all adhere to copyright when choosing hymns.

Alan also suggested it would be more beneficial if the organ could be relocated to the back of the church. This will also leave more space for the band at the front.

It was noted that on 6th December the 'Light up a Light' service will be held again in the church. The speaker will be Chris Everitt and the service will be organised solely by St. David's Hospice Movement.

A.O.B: The Church Prayer Week will be in January, as in the previous year.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 21st February 2012 at 7.30 p.m.

Gwenllian was invited to close the meeting with prayer. The meeting concluded at 9.00 p.m.

Obeying God's Nonsense

By Sharon Frame

“Just Do It” is Nike’s famous call-to-action slogan recognized around the world. It reminds me of another famous phrase that still echoes from the Bible two thousand plus years after it was uttered.

Jesus had given instructions to perform his first miracle in Cana during a wedding. He ordered wine jars to be filled with water. That baffled the wedding reception workers who thought it made no sense. But Mary the mother of Jesus said to them, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” (John 2:5)

Mary’s piercing words still challenge us today; whatever God told you to do, just do it! It doesn’t have to make sense. And oftentimes it won’t. 1st Corinthians 1:27 says, “God uses the foolish things of the world to confound (or shame) the wise.” He also uses nonsense to test our faith. The blessing is in obeying God no matter how strange or seemingly ridiculous His instructions may be.

Just ask the destitute blind beggar in John 9:6. Jesus spat in the dirt, made mud, rubbed it on the man’s eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. By all logical accounts, that was nonsense. But because of his obedience, the man was healed.

God’s divine healing is not just reserved for the physical body. Let’s admit it. God, the Holy Spirit has whispered some amazing, off-the-wall ideas to us; some to cure our ailing finances, or to heal injured relationships. But we hesitate or lollygag, and talk ourselves out of taking action. How many creative, life-changing and God-ordained ideas have you dismissed as crazy? This time why not trust God, and “whatever He said do, just do it.”

The rich young ruler in Scriptures must have thought Jesus was off his rockers the day he met him. He had heard about the charismatic rabbi working miracles and causing quite a buzz around town. So he hunted him down to ask what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. He certainly didn't expect Jesus to say, "Sell all you have, give it to the poor and come follow me." That was just insane, he might have thought. The young man went away with a heavy heart. Sadly, he did not realize that you can't give God anything without getting it back multiple times over, as Luke 18:29-30 makes clear.

Then there was Naaman, the Syrian general. He almost missed his miracle when he dismissed God's method of healing as nonsense. 2nd Kings 5 describes him as a mighty man of valour. But he was also a leper looking to be cured from the devastating illness. He travelled a long distance to visit the prophet Elisha in Israel. Imagine how insulted he was when Elisha didn't even come to the door. Instead, the prophet sent a servant to tell Naaman he should go down to the very dirty Jordan river and dip seven times to be healed. Naaman was furious and stormed away quite upset.

Fortunately, a young servant girl challenged him to believe God. The general laid aside his pride, humbled himself and dipped in the dirty Jordan seven times, just as the prophet had instructed. His turning point to a new life of physical and mental health came when he obeyed. He just did it.

You may have faith for your healing, whether mental, physical or spiritual. But faith without works is dead. Your obedience to "just do whatever God instructed you to do" is the works. So no matter how nonsensical God's command may sound, just do it!

"His mother said to the servants, **"Whatever He says to you, do it."** - *John 2:5*

Sharon Frame is an Award-Winning Empowerment Speaker, a Media Coach and "Follow-Through" Expert. Her passion is to encourage and empower! Sharon's latest book, "Wired to Win" teaches how to Plug In, Power Up and Push Through to Personal Greatness. Visit <http://www.sharonframespeaks.com>...

"There are two key principles for the compassionate person – giving and forgiving."

J. John

God has called each of us to serve Him in the place He has us. In His eyes we all have a ministry. Many serve Him in a local church through a variety of ministries, such as music, teaching, youth work, or by being a part of the church staff. Others serve on the mission field, on the job, at school, or at home.

God knows you and He knows your heart desires to serve Him. You are someone that He will use to make a difference, to share His love, and to touch the hearts of others. What has qualified you for this high privilege of being used by Him? Is it your talents, your personality, your education, your influence, or your resume? It is none of these; rather, it is the response of your heart toward Him. God is always searching for those whose hearts are yielded to Him so that He can work mightily through them.

Sometimes we can be led to think that God's work is dependent upon us, upon what we do, and upon what we know. The truth is that God wants us to be totally dependent upon Him. He is the Treasure, we are the vessels; He is Vine, we are the branches; He is the Living Water, we are the channels through which He flows.

The apostle Peter was someone who needed to learn this important truth. Jesus taught him the futility of trying to get results through his own efforts by allowing him, an expert fisherman, to labour all night and come up empty. Afterwards, when He followed Jesus word to cast out into the deep, Peter pulled in a catch that was beyond his dreams.

As His servant, remember that your ministry is His idea and not yours. He is the One who knows you, who has called you, and who has equipped you to serve Him. Remain true, remain faithful, remain restful, and remain totally dependent upon Him.

God is not looking for those who are clever, but for those in whom He can be wise; He is not looking for those who are talented, but for those to whom He can be all sufficient; He is not looking for those who are powerful, but for those through whom He can be almighty.

It is our prayer that God will encourage you today as you faithfully serve Him, and that He will use you to bring encouragement to others in a special way this Christmas and throughout the new year.

Roy Lessin

2012 . . .

A New Year With The Lord!

A new year is about to unfold
With new opportunities to explore
Doors will open for new experiences
New adventures with the Lord

Remember not the former things
The things of this past year
The Lord will do new things in us
Much more than we are aware

For He will make a way for us
As we put our trust in Him
And He will guide our every step
By His presence we have within

What God has placed within our hearts
We find we'll be able to do
If we look for the opportunities
We'll see the door to go through

We mustn't let anything hold us back
But rise up and take our place
And be all that God wants us to be
With a fresh touch of His grace.

M.S.Lowndes

Dates for your Diary



December

Abergavenny

Sunday 11 6:00 p.m. Borough Theatre, Close Encounters with Ian Coffey

Wednesday 14 7:30 p.m. Prayer Meeting

Thursday 15 2:30 P.m. Friendship Group Christmas Party

Saturday 17 11:00 a.m. Carols Cibi Walk

Sunday 25 10:00 a.m. (note time) Joint service at Castle Street

Llanelly Hill

Thursday 22 7:00 p.m. Carol Service in the Jolly Colliers

Glasbury

Saturday 24 6:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Service

January

NEW YEAR 2012 – Happy New Year!

Monday 9 – 15 January : Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Abergavenny

Monday to Friday 2-6 January at 7:30 a.m. each day – week of prayer.

Friday 6 January 7:30 p.m. Welcome Service Mark Soady at St Mary's

Sunday 8 10:30 a.m. Head of YWAM preaching

Tuesday 10 7:30 p.m. Leadership Team

Wednesday 11 7:30 p.m. Fellowship in the Church. What is Fellowship?

Thursday 12 2:00 p.m. Friendship Group begins

Thursday 12 7:30 p.m. AGM Churches Together

January 16 – 1 February Rev Andy Williams away.

Sunday February 5 **6:00 p.m. Close Encounters at Derri View**