

## Bro Cybi Ministry Area



### FEEDBACK FROM PANDEMIC LESSONS LEARNED

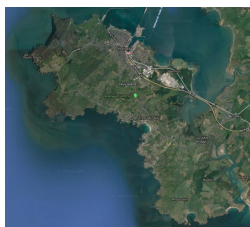
Following the completion of the Report on Lessons Learned from the Pandemic (compiled from responses from both laity and the clergy in Bro Cybi MA), Rob was interviewed with questions drawn from the Report This is that interview.

*Stewart: Let me start by setting the scene; a large number (but not all) of the laity used words to describe their clergy as: 'disappointing', 'the clergy are invisible', there is a lack of contact' and 'they don't care'. Why were such a large number of the laity not contacted by phone by the clergy?*

Rob: There has been a failure of Pastoral Care which is my responsibility. I can only say that I am very sorry if people feel let down by their clergy. We do care, but if people have not felt cared for, then there has been a failure. At the beginning of the lockdown I suggested to my colleagues that we split the four church congregations between us and each would telephone the people on our list. Clearly, we did not contact everyone regularly enough or at all and we should have done better.

*Stewart: You were visible on Facebook at your farm in Blaenau Ffestiniog but not in Holyhead. The Laity assumed that you were on holiday and away from your clerical duties – was this the case?*

Rob: At the beginning of the first lockdown I did live and work mostly from the farm. The clergy including myself were all working from home throughout the two lockdown periods, apart from days off and annual leave. We worked 'virtually', on Zoom, reading and also writing on our computers and on the phone. The restrictions we worked under prevented us from leaving home apart from essential journeys, for example to attend medical appointments and to buy essential supplies. The only person I could spend time with during the lockdown periods was Carol. She moved to the farm from Glasgow at the beginning of the lockdown in March 2020, she didn't know anyone in Wales at that time apart from me. I spent two to three days per week in Holyhead, working from the vicarage, taking funerals and checking on the churches and buildings as necessary. I think it would have been very difficult for me to spend all of my time at Holyhead during the lockdown periods, having moved here only 5 months before the first lockdown and not being able to see or spend time with anyone else. I now just spend days off at the farm and I live in Holyhead; I'm gradually getting to know the town and everyone here.



## Bro Cybi Ministry Area

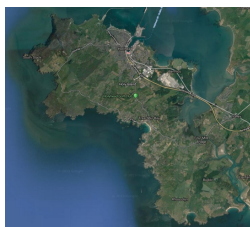
*Stewart: The laity have no idea, on a day-to-day basis, what the clergy are doing. What have you been doing and what are you doing going forward?*

Rob: At the beginning of lockdown I felt the priority for me and the Ministry Team should be to lead people in faith and faithfulness. We were entering the unknown in terms of the future of practising our faith, we could not gather in our churches and we could not worship or disciple people in the way we had done. We did not know how long it would last and we knew things would be different when we emerged; that church would not be the same. In theological terms we were entering a wilderness. Looking to the biblical stories of wilderness and leadership during those periods, we knew that faithfulness was the single most important issue and challenge for us all. Therefore we spent a good deal of our time putting together and leading worship on Zoom and Youtube. We studied and wrote reflections and recorded them. Building and Ezra projects continued and were often more time consuming for me during the pandemic. There were pastoral situations to deal with, some of them acute and potentially challenging for the church. It would be inappropriate for me to detail them here. There was pastoral work to do with illness and bereavement, which was often extremely distressing for the people and families involved. And there were many funerals. Re-arranging weddings and dealing with often distressed couples was another area of work. And keeping each other feeling ok; many clergy and lay colleagues struggled during the pandemic.

Going forward, our priority will be mission. We have emerged from the pandemic and we now need to shift our focus to mission. I will be sharing more details about this at a forthcoming MAC and also to church committees and members.

*Stewart: Why were the clergy not seen around the shops in Holyhead to make contact with local people (and show that the church is concerned for our local community)?*

Rob: I am very much a people person and I would have loved to have been able to do this, but the law prevented us from leaving our homes. During the pandemic, clergy were not classed as key workers; the clergy were under the same lockdown restrictions as everyone else. Having said that, the only situations where I had people-contact during the lockdown periods was in Holyhead Coop, Morrisons and at funerals. Unfortunately, due to being new in the area the vast majority of people did not know me. That was very strange for me, in my previous parish I was very well known and would chat with people everywhere I went and I missed in-person people ministry very much during lockdown. Two of my colleagues were shielding during the lockdown periods and the third is of an age to be classed as 'vulnerable'. To my knowledge they did not leave home for shopping, only for exercise and they certainly did not conduct funerals.



## Bro Cybi Ministry Area

*Stewart: Given that 'Communicating' and Knowing the People' are elements of good leadership, what do you plan to do in future to improve this aspect?*

Rob: I would hope to restart the after-service consultations with the congregations in the future. I did these soon after arriving in Bro Cybi and I think that was a good way for people to voice their views, ideas and concerns. I made a proposal prior to lockdown about a parish magazine. In order to make this happen we will need someone to lead on putting it together. I am doing home communions and visits and have asked people to let me know if there is anyone who will benefit from a visit.

We have much to do to improve our social media and internet communications. I have previously voiced the need for this and it would be hugely valuable for us to have someone who will take this on as their role.

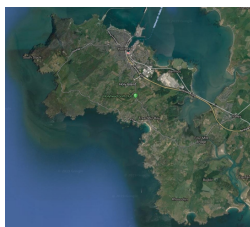
The mission proposals I will soon be sharing will focus on being out in the community, connecting and communicating with as many people as possible in our Ministry Area.

*Stewart During the Pandemic, we were not allowed to have Communion Wine? Whilst the problems of using the Chalice are understood, why could bread not be dipped in the wine or perhaps individual disposal cups used?*

Rob: The Church in Wales guideline(rules) have prevented the congregation from having communion in two kinds. The guidelines also state that a person is receiving full communion even if they are receiving only the wafer(host). A short while ago the guidelines were amended to allow for communion in both kinds, by the priest dipping the wafer. However, there are also some additional requirements in the guidelines and the process has to be approved by the Ministry Area Council and Archdeacon. I am hoping to gain this approval soon.

*Stewart: Some comments were made as to the timings of zoom services especially when these coincided with meal preparation times. Can these be changed?*

Rob: Yes they can be changed. We have always sought to consult with people about services, events and times. As clergy and readers we will schedule things at times which are best for the people rather than for ourselves. In my regular letters I always ask people to tell me what they think and what they want to see happen or change.



## Bro Cybi Ministry Area

*Stewart: Having covered the main areas that upset people, it is important to acknowledge that there was also praise: So to start, Pat Hughes and the mail delivery team were widely praised. How do you see this communication medium being used in future?*

Rob: Pat and the delivery team did a wonderful job during lockdown. As I said previously I think it should be noted that as Church in Wales clergy and readers we were instructed not to be out in the community during lockdown, including making deliveries and talking to people on the doorstep, that may seem unreasonable but that was the rule we were given, repeatedly. I struggled with that and I did contravene that rule on occasion and I also offered to deliver mailings. As a Ministry Team we spent a good deal of our time producing all the material which was delivered in the mailings.

I am hopeful that we can produce a parish magazine in the future and this can be delivered, as well as being available in shops and businesses in the Ministry Area

*Stewart: There was a remarkable willingness by the laity to keep in touch with each other. Whilst this did not replace the need for clergy contact, nevertheless it was important for keeping the church community together.*

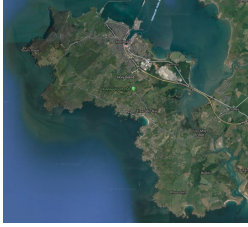
Rob: I can only repeat what I said at the beginning of my weekly letters; that I was hugely encouraged by people's care for each other. I was therefore really disappointed when I heard that some people felt uncared for.

*Stewart: The use of zoom and youtube was widely praised (although not everyone found such medium as uplifting as being in church). Will you continue to use zoom and utube?*

Rob: Zoom is continuing on Sunday mornings and for prayer meetings currently. We do many of our church, ministry team, mission planning, Synod and Diocesan meetings on Zoom now which I think is a good thing. I am currently trialling recording talks and will keep assessing the viability of this by looking at viewing figures. We will continue with Zoom and Youtube if people want it, ie if we see that people attending and watching.

*Stewart: Changes were made to the process of booking weddings with resultant improved traceability and accountability: do you intend to keep this new process?*

Rob: We brought in new processes for weddings and baptisms during the pandemic, these had needed overhauling anyway and we will continue to improve them as needed. I am not currently proposing re-opening Eglwys y Bedd for bookings.



## Bro Cybi Ministry Area

*Stewart: The use of a bank card reader for payments was introduced in St Cybi's. Do you intend to make wider use of such systems?*

Rob: I have encouraged all our church committees to consider non-cash systems for some time. We have begun, but there is a considerable way to go to take full advantage of new technologies in my view.

*Stewart: We covered a lot of ground but I wondered whether there was anything further that you would wish to add?*

Rob: I pleased that we now have a clear and open process for dealing with Ministry Area finances. That needed sorting out and it has been done.

And I'm grateful that I and we have survived this pandemic, so far. I know that many of you have lost dear friends over the last eighteen months.

Going into the wilderness of lockdown five months after moving into a new ministry area has been a considerable challenge and I have been grateful for the encouragements I have received. Being given an Ezra process and having to take on the management of the St Cybi's building, including everything from changing candles to working with re-ordering proposals – was not what I intended when I arrived here. I am a people person rather than a buildings person, my calling is to minister to people and to all the people in our Ministry Area. But my calling is also to work in whatever situation I find myself in and I believe I have tried to do this and to act with integrity and do whatever needed to be done. If nothing else, the pandemic has revealed to me the size of the task before me.

I very much look forward to the future, and to the exciting mission opportunities which may be possible for us in our Ministry Area.

*Stewart: Thank you for your time and very willing and honest approach to the Lessons Learned Exercise.*