

# 'Thinking outside the Box'



## The Revd Ian Hodges of Llanilid and Pencoed, tells his remarkable story from The Time is Now conference

**"The Church in Wales may look like it always has but it is beginning to undergo a period of change like it has never seen before. Not immediately apparent but slowly arriving is the move from vicars in parishes to teams of people working in much larger Ministry Areas to spread the Good News of Jesus.**

It all started with a review in July 2012 and in November 2014 there was a conference, called The Time is Now (2020 Vision), where representatives gathered from all over the province to take stock. 2020 is a play on 'perfect vision' and that the year 2020 is a mark in the sand for the reorganisation.

The conference was in Llandudno across a Friday and Saturday. In my opinion it was at the wrong time in the wrong place and certainly not long enough to do the subject justice. It was exhausting and rushed. That said the content of the conference was fantastic and the feeling of hope for the future was greater that I have felt in the church for a long time. But for me, even before attending the conference, my question was "Is this 2020 Vision of God, or man just rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic?"

The organisers had thought of a way to make people feel more involved at a parish level. They gave every church a football sized cardboard cube and asked for them to be decorated to show the way that God had worked in that place over the years. These would then all be taken to a service in Llandaff Cathedral and then some of them would get to the conference itself in Llandudno.

I was a little concerned about the one from Heol-Y-Cyw as it had 'precious cargo'. Lesley, one of our own, died quite suddenly in early 2014 and to be truthful we are still a bit in shock all this time later. So on the cube was put her picture and a bit about her. Inside the cube was put a little baby Jesus that Lesley had knitted.

As I was taking the cubes down to the service in Llandaff I was having a quiet word with God telling him to make sure he kept an eye on Lesley's Jesus. I know it sounds funny telling the creator and sustainer of the universe what to do but I think he has broad shoulders! Anyway the cubes get left in Llandaff and when I get to Llandudno I

could not see any sign of any of the boxes that represent the parish, so I presumed they never made it.

At the end of the conference we had a Communion service and the culmination of the service was for the cubes that had been gathered there to be distributed throughout the room. I was sat about halfway back in the room on the left hand side as I remember and watched as these boxes were handed back from person to person.

*Then the lady next to me handed me one.*

*Guess which one it was.*

*It was the one from Heol-Y-Cyw.*

I laughed out loud so much so the lady next to me asked if I was okay. I explained to her all about Lesley and all about the precious cargo and all about my bargain with God. We were both crying by this point. She then explained that she would be more than happy to swap with the cube that she had been given, especially as what they needed in their church was a new Jesus for their Christmas crib.

So coming back to my original question is this 2020 Vision of God, or man just rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic? Basically is God in the middle of all this? Well I would say if he can sneak precious cargo to a conference under my nose and then get it handed to me without me leaving my seat I think it is fair to say that the reorganisation of the Church in Wales is safe in his hands if we listen to him.

He can be trusted with 'precious cargo'; He can be trusted with 2020 vision; He can be trusted with whatever you hold dear."

