

Dear Friends,

Friday, September 26th

We have been here at St. Deniol's Library for five nights. We have enjoyed our time here and decided to stay another night. We will travel on to St. David's tomorrow. We will worship at St. David's Cathedral on Sunday.

I have spent a couple of days in the library. Also, for two days this week we visited some of the churches in this northern area of Wales. On Thursday we visited three churches along the ancient pilgrimage route on the Llyn peninsula leading to Bardsey Island. The other churches we visited Thursday were in Betws-y-coed. Betws-y-coed is a small village in the mountains of Wales, and adjacent to a national park. The village reminded both Virginia and me of Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Betws-y-coed is not as large or as commercial as Gatlinburg, but it is clearly a tourist destination.

The reason we went to the village was to visit the two Anglican churches (The Church of Wales) upon the recommendation of a friend who had been there. There are two churches in the village, although one of them is no longer used for worship. The congregation moved to the new church when they out-grew the older church. The two churches give new meaning to the term "new" and "old."

The first church we visited was St. Mary's Church - the larger and newer church built in 1873. The date of 1873 reminds me that new is a relative term - since I seldom think of something 135 years old as new. While the building was from 1873, the interior was a blend of traditional and contemporary or modern. The altar hanging were a modern design (based upon a cross section of a pine cone), and some of the other ornamentation was also modern. It was a good indication that the traditional and modern can be blended together.

When we left St. Mary's, we walked to the other church - known as St. Michael's Old Church. Like the use of the word "new" for St. Mary's, "old" is also a relative term. We might have said "very old" or ancient. The church is the oldest building in the village, and has changed far less than its surroundings. Most of the building dates from the 14th century - and parts were unchanged. It was expanded in 1843 but soon was found to be too small for the growing congregation - and was more or less abandoned in favor of St. Mary's. The baptismal font was older than the church building, dating from the 13th century. The Friends of St. Michael's has a website you can visit:

[www.stmichaelsbyc.org.uk](http://www.stmichaelsbyc.org.uk) if you want to know more about St. Michael's.

The following is from the brochure about St. Michael's. "St. Michael's, to 21st century eyes, seems the essence of simplicity and peace; but that belies its central role in earlier times. The institution of the church in medieval times was very important in people's day-to-day lives. Even in such a remote and mountainous area, the priesthood, the monks who lived at Maenan Abbey six miles away, and traveling friars, were a link to the Pope in Rome and the wider world; and the bishops of Bangor and St. Asaph would have

played important political as well as pastoral roles. the local populace would have come to this building not only for baptisms and funerals, to take the Eucharist and hear the liturgy; they would have come also to hear the news and gossip."

In some ways, as we gather as the church - as a worshiping community - we have not change in 600 years. We still gather for worship and the sacraments - and to exchange new - and maybe some gossip. The church - where ever we are - is always a blend of old and new - no matter how old and how new; of traditional and modern. Our challenge will always be to find that balance between old and new, tradition and contemporary, that speaks to our spiritual needs today.

The other three churches we visited on Thursday were even older than St. Michael's Old Church. As I noted above, they were part of a medieval pilgrimage route. While all three are over a thousand years old, they are still used for worship today. The church must always be a living tradition touching our lives - or else it becomes a museum or an empty building without life - (just ask Virginia how many ruins we saw - which are buildings without life).

I hope your time with Diana Butler Bass was beneficial for those who were able to attend. When I have heard her speak, I understood her aim is to bring life and vitality to the church of today - while not losing the heritage and tradition of the church.

Peace,  
Bruce +