
Ministry Team Letter

Dear Friends,

I want to engage you in a conversation. It concerns children and communion, two faces of our life as a church family that represent our very essence. Children are not only, as is sometimes said, the future church, they are active members of the body of Christ *now*, and their presence (or absence) is a constant and vital challenge to our ways of thinking and acting. Communion, it goes without saying, is what we are and do, what gives life and strength to the body of Christ. The conversation I want to hold is about admitting children to communion. Why might children receive communion? What are the reasons for excluding them?

Two of the possible objections are clear: children do not have enough understanding to receive the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, and they are not always going to show due reverence.

Understanding. How important in fact is our understanding of communion? Can any one of us be said to have understood what the church has always described as the deepest of mysteries? Communion is belonging together, to each other as a church family and collectively to God and to Christ. A child does not need to know what any of those words mean to experience the reality of being included, or not. If mental understanding is essential, what should we do with a lifelong communicant who develops Alzheimer's or some other mental disability? What should we do with adults with learning difficulties?

Reverence. Children are certainly capable of great reverence if they are included in an act of worship rather than passive spectators of it. Watch any child invited to help with the collection or with bringing up the elements for communion. We may also need to consider carefully what we mean by reverence. Do we sometimes confuse reverence with solemnity? Might not the occasionally exuberant reverence of children be what we need? Remember King David dancing wildly and half-naked before the Ark of the Lord (2 Samuel 6:14-16, 21-22). (We could possibly do without the half-naked bit, I feel.)

I suppose it is clear where I stand, but let us talk together about this as a parish. We need to discuss it, because there is a growing number of parishes both in this diocese and in the Church of England as a whole where children do already receive communion, not to mention entire Anglican provinces overseas and the Orthodox churches, which may seem surprising because they are in some ways the most conservative and traditional of all. If a child who regularly receives communion elsewhere comes to us, we are obliged to let him or her receive here also.

What I want to do is to get us all talking, with sensitivity and love, about this matter. At some point next year I will circulate a discussion paper that sets out some of the points that need to be considered in greater detail than there is space for here. I then propose to hold a parish meeting at which we can continue our conversation *en masse*. Finally, taking into consideration the weight of feeling in

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the parish as a whole, the PCC would vote on the issue. If the vote were in favour, we would then apply to the bishop for permission to admit children to communion. (I will spell out the mechanics of admission in detail in the discussion paper.) I envisage this process taking no more than a year from now.

We need to be keenly aware that this touches on the heart of our life together and that people are likely to feel strongly about it. Whether we opt for change or decide not to, it is very probable that some will feel hurt and bewildered by the decision we make. Even more than the outcome of this conversation, what matters most is how we conduct it. Our true communion consists in more than the reception of the consecrated bread and wine; our communion is the unifying presence of the living Spirit of Christ among us, which is what makes us one, although opinions and ways of thinking may differ greatly on many subjects. In this as in all things, let us hold that 'committed union' as most precious of all.

You might have expected to find a letter with a Christmas theme in this month's magazine, but in a sense this matter does relate to Christmas. What we are about to celebrate is of course the birth of the one who *is* our communion. In describing the birth of Jesus in such detail, the Gospel writers Matthew and Luke do something that is remarkable in any age, and perhaps unprecedented in their own: they make a baby the chief character in a drama. That drama is, of course, the eternal tale of how you and I and all of creation are brought from darkness to light. Those of us who will kneel this Christmas to

receive the living Christ into our own lives, might begin this conversation by asking Him what He is saying to us today about His own worship, His Holy Communion, here at St Mary's.

With love, and with prayers for a truly blessed and joyful Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

David

<p>This month's cover</p> <p>Lawrence depicts the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem</p>

A personal tribute to Penny Jones

I have a card which Penny made for my Reader licensing in April 2004. In blue and gold thread, she embroidered a cross with the date and the word 'ALLELUIA' curving around it. In that simple gift there is so much that speaks to me of Penny. I know that as she made the card she would have been praying – for me, for our church, for others being licensed that day. I know, too, that in her heart she shared in my rejoicing, just as throughout my training she had been steadily supportive, encouraging and interested in my progress and well-being. In many ways Penny was a true soul friend to me, as I'm sure she was to others.

Penny was a deeply prayerful person, and her prayer infused her whole life. Before joining us at St Mary's she had practised and taught Buddhist meditation, and she longed to find a Christian form of prayer that integrated body, mind and spirit. She eventually found what she was looking

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for at a Mothers' Union retreat led by Bishop Simon Barrington-Ward on the Jesus Prayer – 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' During the last two years of her life, the practice of this prayer became the backbone of Penny's spiritual life.

Penny was a faithful member of the Mothers' Union and a devoted branch leader; and these qualities of faithful devotion shone through in all she did. I came to know Penny through the Emmaus Home Group we both belonged to. Everyone in that group benefited from Penny's open sharing, and from the integrity of her desire to live her life fully centred on God.

As churchwarden, Penny lived her gifts of faithfulness to the full, and made the job her own. Many newcomers and strangers to our congregation were warmed by her welcoming smile as she directed them to seats and ensured they had all they needed. She was a rock to the ministry team, always anticipating our needs and always totally dependable. She rose to the demands of the interregnum with grace and determination, ensuring services were covered, chairing the PCC, and fulfilling the role of parish representative in appointing our new priest-in-charge.

Penny died as she lived – with prayerfulness, grace and determination. Having shared in David's licensing service and overseen the Harvest Thanksgiving weekend, which she had so diligently inspired and prepared, her duties as churchwarden were complete – nothing was left undone. Her wonderful smile and infectious laughter were ever-present, and if in those last weeks you

asked her how she was feeling, she would reply, 'I am content' – and she truly was.

Penny's friendship will always be a precious jewel in my heart. Just now that jewel is sparkling through my tears – tears at the loss of such a special friend.

But Penny would not want me – or any of us – to be too sad for too long. Soon that precious jewel will shine again of its own accord, reflecting Penny's love and many gifts of faith, and resonating with the word she chose to embroider on my card: 'Alleluia'.

Pat Saunders

Mothers' Union

At the November meeting Joan Walton gave another outstanding slide show entitled 'The New Testament in Wood, Stone and Glass'. Joan is an expert photographer and, as usual, the slides she showed were varied and interesting, going from the Annunciation to the Resurrection. We saw some wonderful stained glass, both ancient and modern. She had found some exceptionally beautiful statues and we were much surprised by the fact that Joseph often looked very sad and worried. We surmised that he had a great deal to worry about with Herod on the warpath. We all enjoyed our afternoon immensely and are already looking forward to November next year.

Our next meeting will take place at the Queen Elizabeth School Hall at 2 pm on Tuesday 5 December when we shall offer

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entertainment, tea and refreshments to members of the other deanery branches of the Mothers' Union.

Jean Morgan

Wives' Group

We were fortunate to have Julie Dore, a medical herbalist, as our speaker at the November meeting. Julie has a degree in plant medicine and lots of experience in her work, and this showed as she gave us an interesting insight into medicinal uses of plants and herbs. Did you know dried nettles make a great tea, and dried rosemary, coarse sea salt and Epsom salts a marvellous bath salt to help aching muscles? Peppermint, salt and a few drops of essential oil make a foot soak to die for!

Julie spent time letting us rub in creams, drink herbal teas, smell infusions and ask lots of questions. She gave us ideas for presents and we all enjoyed her talk very much. Check her website www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk for more information. Please note our Christmas party on Tuesday 12 December will be at St Anne's School, London Road at the earlier time of 7.30 pm. Everyone welcome. Please bring a wrapped gift of about £3, a plate of food to share and your best party mood! Any queries to Barbara Thirwall (457018).

Olwyn Hurd

Men's Social Group

It would be rather worrying if you opened your paper and found that you were the subject of an obituary! Well, according to

Andrew McKie, the speaker at our November meeting, this is fortunately very unlikely to happen. Andrew, who for the last six years has been the obituary editor at *The Daily Telegraph*, was talking to us about what's involved in the production, on average, of three obituaries six days a week. There is no shortage of subjects, but only about one in ten of possible candidates ever makes it onto the pages of the paper.

Although Andrew writes many of the obituaries himself, a number of specialists are also employed. For instance there are writers who cover the armed forces; they cover mainly the officer ranks, although non-commissioned ranks in the army have their own specialist writer. The armed forces' obituaries usually focus on those who have served with distinction and have received awards. Other specialist writers cover the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches, sport and business. And even circus performers!

Many obituaries have been written in advance and filed away. Much of Andrew's time is spent identifying those who might make it to the obituary page, and assembling relevant information. There are also the sudden deaths to deal with, which can result in late nights writing to meet the paper's deadlines. There are many sources of information about people's lives - newspaper cuttings, biographies and speaking to families, friends and acquaintances.

About twenty years ago obituary writing underwent a sort of makeover. Previously they had typically occupied only a few column inches, consisting of a chronological list of the person's

achievements. Nowadays they occupy more space, and in *The Daily Telegraph* it has extended to almost a full page. In an attempt to make the person's life come alive they are often supported by anecdotes and snatches of humour. The aim is to give a warts and all picture, although any criticism may sometimes be couched in euphemistic terms.

A great deal of trouble is taken to ensure that an obituary is factually correct, well written and accords with the paper's standards. Obituaries follow an established format and always start with the date of death and a very short summary of the main achievement of the person concerned. The last paragraph always makes reference to marriages and offspring. In order that a wide range of lives are covered each day, obituaries are not always presented in chronological order or directly following a death. And there is always pressure from the armed forces to ensure there is a balance between the different services.

The impression derived from Andrew's talk is that obituary writing is almost an art form in its own right. The aim is to provide reflection on an interesting life in a way that is both informative and entertaining for the reader. Andrew certainly fulfilled these requirements in his talk, which was much appreciated by his audience. Many thanks, Andrew; you may even have encouraged some of your audience to switch from their usual paper to *The Daily Telegraph*!

Peter Dawe



Charity of the month

In December we support a range of charities to which we make a small donation. The amount donated depends upon the amount of money available at the end of the year, after having supported our monthly charities, based on the principle of 10% of our offertory collection. In recent years we have given around £100 to £150 each to ten charities. In addition, we have given our five Christmas service collections to another five charities. However, this year the PCC capped our total annual giving to £4000 and the Finance Committee directed that collections from the Nine Lessons and Carols and Midnight Eucharist should be retained for church funds. Consequently, the amount we have to distribute amongst the fifteen charities this month has been markedly reduced. I anticipate that this year we will be limited to about £90 each. Nevertheless, we will have still provided financial support to some twenty-eight charities during the year. The Charities Committee recently selected the December charities and they are as follows:

Childline; Leprosy Mission; Relate; Hinchbrooke Hospital Chaplain; St Luke's Hospital; Mission to Seafarers; Gideon International; Ridley Hall Youth Ministry; The Samaritans; Clergy Benevolent Fund – Uganda; Jimmy's Night Shelter; Carers (UK)

Christmas Services

Children's Society – Christingle
East Anglia Children's Hospice – Family Carols
Cruse Bereavement Care – Christmas Day

Roy Norris – Charities Committee



St Anne's School is 'a good school with outstanding features'

Government inspectors have praised St Anne's C of E Primary School in Godmanchester as a good school with some outstanding features.

The inspectors from OfSTED – the Office for Standards in Education – highlighted leadership, teaching and children's behaviour and personal development as some of the school's strengths.

They said headteacher, Anthea Kenna, had a clear vision for the future, and had established an excellent caring ethos in which all children were valued as individuals.

'She shares her vision for the future of the school with all staff and governors, so that an excellent team spirit prevails. Governors offer good support, but also challenge the school to account for its performance. Consequently, this is a school that knows how well it is doing and what to do to improve,' said their report.

Inspectors said an excellent range of learning activities in lessons and in after-school clubs, and good teaching, resulted in good achievement.

'Teachers know that children enjoy practical activities and they have worked successfully to provide these. The school has good systems for checking how well children are progressing. The best

teaching uses this information very effectively,' the report added.

The behaviour of pupils was rated as 'outstanding', as was their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors said children had 'exceptional' social skills.

'Behaviour is exemplary and relationships between children are excellent. Their good attendance is a clear indicator of how much children enjoy school, as is the enthusiastic way they talk about how teachers make lessons interesting,' said the inspectors.

'This is a good school. It has some outstanding features particularly in the way it cares for the children and promotes their personal development. Good achievement is underpinned by the caring Christian ethos of the school, which leads to outstanding personal development of children.'

'There is a strong commitment to continuous improvement. This is a school that is well placed to continue improving,' concluded the report.

Inspectors stressed that there were few issues for improvement, but encouraged the school to use results more rigorously to check the impact on children's learning, to ensure children receive the clearest guidance on how to reach their targets and to ensure all parents feel their views are valued.



A view from the pew

A keen autumn wind swept the brightly coloured leaves under our feet as we headed for another Boyan concert, and at the church door there was a warm welcome. The brightly lit candles flickered to the sound of excitable chatter – it was a warm and cosy welcome. The audience drifted in with wide smiles of expectation, meeting friends and acquaintances with joy and delight. Greetings were exchanged, coats and hats removed, and seats taken to enjoy the pleasure everyone knew would be in store for them.

The Boyan Ensemble of Kiev celebrates its 15th consecutive concert tour of the UK this year. The twenty-five singers include the twin brother conductors, Yuri and Volodymyr Kuratch, and Valentine Ivanenko, the only female voice soprano. The choir's repertoire embraces Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian, Georgian, and other Slavonic and Western European sacred and classical music, as well as vocal symphonic works. Over the past fourteen years, the choir has brought great joy and inspiration to parish audiences, and has gained an extensive following, featuring also on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM.

It is without doubt that we owe our thanks to Liz and Andrew Auster, who had the foresight to put these concert tours in place fifteen years ago. Andrew is the Headmaster of Orwell Park School in Nacton, near Ipswich, and as a musical man, he informed me, he saw a great potential in organising these visits for the Boyan Ensemble, for our enjoyment as

well as earning essential revenue for them.

The show is about to begin! The choir, each dressed in a black cassock and carrying a lighted candle, enters the darkened church in vocal symphony to the solemn tolling of a bell, and approaches the platform. 'My Soul, My Soul Arise! Why are you Sleeping?' But no one was sleeping, simply mesmerised by this incredible and beautiful sound. 'These men love singing', someone said to me, 'you can see it in their faces. I am sure that they could sing all night.' From ancient chants, the Dogmatikan containing the teaching of the Holy Church about the Virgin Birth, to the fun of the zany Ukrainian comic song about Kuperian (the Guild master) inviting all his friends and colleagues for a few drinks, flowed the same vocal brilliance. The body language of the unique playing of the three musical scythes left you in no doubt as to their fun-loving nature.

Among the qualities that make this choir supreme is the vast range of dynamics from the most alive pianissimos to the breathtakingly brilliant fortissimos. Let us wish them well, an enjoyable tour, and pray for their safe return home to their families, to whom we also owe our thanks for being without them for a while.

Gillian Bathurst Hoile

Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust sponsored cycle ride

The annual sponsored cycle ride was held on 9 September this year and Bob Turrell, Heidi Shepherd and Mike Weedon took part, visiting fourteen churches in the area

between them. Our church welcomed seventeen visiting riders with squash and biscuits on what was a glorious sunny day. We raised £305, half of which will be given to our church. The other half will be retained by the Trust and distributed to churches in special need to help with the cost of repairs and for restoration. Thank you to all who provided sponsorship and who helped on the day.

Mike Weedon

Book review Dawkins' delusion

Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*.
Bantam Press, 2006.
ISBN 0593055489

Richard Dawkins is a zoologist whose DPhil thesis at Oxford was on the way domestic chicks peck each other. Those of us who get the chance of a post-graduate degree do very odd things. He became a lecturer in zoology at Oxford and wrote three books which explained the work of Darwin with quite remarkable clarity. I am indebted to them because they persuaded me to do my theology from the way the biological world actually is, rather than from the fundamentalist creationist ideas I had been brought up with.

Dawkins became Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford, and our problems began. He took the view (not shared by us all) that God is seen, by those who believe in God, as an explanation. Because science was a good explanation of most things, thought Dawkins, therefore there can be no God.

His recent book, *The God Delusion*, has become a best seller. Sadly, it must be one of the least scientific books to have reached the bookshelves.

His view is essentially that if a scientist says anything – about anything – then it must be true: if he does not believe in God, then there is no God. And, if anyone disagrees with Dawkins then, by definition, he must be wrong. That ill-accords with the normally courteous open-mindedness that one expects – including, he says himself – from scientists.

Here is one example. A universe with God would, says Dawkins, be utterly different from a universe without one. He offers no evidence for that: it is merely an assertion. 'I am a scientist; and I assert it; therefore it must be true'. That's, quite clearly, nonsense and has no more validity than 'I am an estate agent; if I assert it; therefore it is true'. Indeed, one might well expect more rationality from estate agents who at least tend to stick to their expertise.

Whether God exists, says Dawkins, is a scientific question: either he exists or he doesn't. That presupposes that God is, so to speak, 'smaller' than Dawkins and subject to be assessed by a zoologist. But suppose that God is bigger than Dawkins; suppose he chooses not to be constrained, to be elusive and to be known not in graphs, but in relationships.

Dawkins contradicts himself in ways that are risible. A universe with God, says Dawkins, would be utterly different from one without God. What if we don't have the clues to tell the difference? Later in

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the book, he applauds a philosopher who got his students to think about how anyone would see a difference between the sun going round the earth, as opposed to the earth going round the sun. They would look the same. So why would a universe with God look different from one without God? Because Richard Dawkins tells you so, that's why. And if you disagree with him then, by definition, you must be wrong. My God, what a God Richard Dawkins must be.

Jeremy Craddock

If you would like to read this book, Jerry is happy to lend you his copy. You may also have some comments you'd like to share with us in the magazine

October PCC Meeting

Minutes in full of all PCC meetings are displayed at the back of the church. Here are some key points from the October meeting.

Finance Committee

- Gift Day appeal raised £2,330, of which £2,120 gift-aided. (2005 figure: £3,112)

Fabric Committee

- Following tests on new speakers, church audio system to be upgraded. Upgrade includes three new speakers and volume control for the chancel.
- Portable aluminium ramp to be purchased for wheelchair use between the nave and altar platform.
- Northwest corner of church. Proposed curtained area not

acceptable to diocesan architect. Cupboards to be located instead.

- Work in hand to ameliorate defacement of west tower by pigeons, and theft of lightning conductor at ground level by vandals.

Churches Together

- Volunteers required for Churches Together Christmas meal.

Vicarage and grounds

- Still no official line from the diocese on future proposals.

Deanery Synod

- Parish share to be 8% higher in 2007 than 2006. Treasurer anticipates it will be paid in full.

Church website

- Parish to have its own website
- *stmarysgodmanchester.org* the agreed domain name
- Cost: £100 p.a.
- Paul Sibley to lead on this.

Ministry news

- Healing and Wholeness services to be continued following discussions with Ministry Team and Worship Group.
- Children and Communion. Administration of communion wafers to children prior to confirmation is moving up the church agenda, both locally and nationally. Parish discussion recommended.
- Baptism policy. Grassroots service does not meet all the needs of those being baptised. Review of baptism preparation, time and format of service, with parish consultation, recommended.

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Island Hall Carol Concert – 21 December

At the kind invitation of Lady Linda and Christopher Vane Percy, the augmented church choir will be giving a concert of Christmas carols in Island Hall on Thursday, 21 December, starting at 8.00 pm. The proceeds will be donated to church funds and tickets at £8 (£7 for senior citizens) will be on sale after the 9.45 am service on each Sunday leading up to the event or from Ken Diffey on 458846. The number will be strictly limited to 70 and will be sold on a ‘first come first served’ basis.

The Registers

Burial of Ashes

10 November Fred Hollingsworth

Funerals

15 November Betty Stretch
 28 November Frederick Jarrod



The Lectionary

3 December **Advent Sunday**
 Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36

10 December **Advent 2**
 Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 3:1-6

17 December **Advent 3**
 Zephaniah 3:14-end; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

24 December **Advent 4**
 Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55

25 December **Christmas Day**
 Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20

31 December **Christmas 1**
 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Luke 2:41-end

Dates for your Diary

December

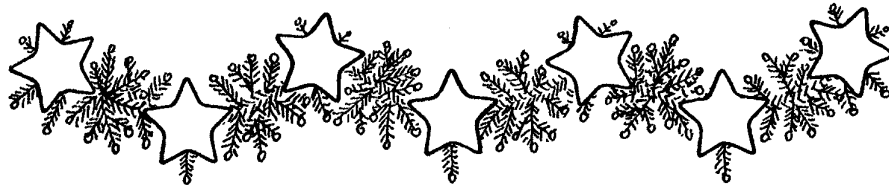
Sun 3	8.00 pm	Holy Communion
	9.45 am	All-age Eucharist
	6.30 pm	Advent Carol Service
Mon 4	1.30 pm	Stepping Stones (Baptist Church Centre)
	7.30 pm	Worship Group (The Vicarage)

G O D M A N C H E S T E R P A R I S H N E W S

Tue	5	2.15 pm	Mothers' Union (Queen Elizabeth School)
		7.30 pm	Men's Social Group Christmas Dinner (9 Porch Close)
Wed	6	3.30 pm	Pastoral Team Meeting
Thur	7	9.30 am	St Mary's 0s-5s (Comrades Club)
Sat	9	7.30 pm	Huntingdon Male Voice Choir Carol Concert
Sun	10	8.00 am	Holy Communion
		9.45 am	Sung Eucharist
		6.30 pm	Sung Evensong
Mon	11	1.30 pm	Stepping Stones (Baptist Church Centre)
		7.30 pm	Hinchingbrooke School Chamber Choir Carol Concert
Tue	12	6.00 pm	St Anne's School Carol Service
		8.00 pm	Wives' Group
Wed	13	6.00 pm	Mayor's Carol Service and switching on of Christmas lights (Town Hall.)
Thur	14	9.30 am	St Mary's 0s-5s (Comrades Club)
		7.00 pm	Wood Green Animal Shelter Carol Service
Sun	17	8.00 am	Holy Communion
		9.45 am	Sung Eucharist
		3.00 pm	Christingle Service
		4.00 pm	Rectory Gardens Carol Service
		6.30 pm	Sung Evensong
Wed	20	9.45 am	McCartney House Christmas Service
		11.00 am	Woodley Court Christmas Service
		8.00 pm	Island Hall Carol Concert
Thur	21	9.30 am	St Mary's 0s-5s (Comrades Club)
Sat	23	8.30 am – 12 noon	Flower Guild decorating the church
Sun	24	8.00 am	Holy Communion
		9.45 am	Eucharist with Hymns
		4.00 pm	Nativity Service
		6.00 pm	Christmas Eve Carol Service
		8.00 pm	Quiet Christmas
		11.30 pm	First Eucharist of Christmas (Midnight Mass)
Mon	25	8.00 am	Holy Communion
<i>Christmas</i>		9.45 am	Sung Eucharist
<i>Day</i>		6.30 pm	Evening Prayer
Sun	31	8.00 am	Holy Communion
<i>New Year's</i>		9.45 am	Sung Eucharist
<i>Eve</i>		6.30 pm	Evening prayer
		11.00 pm	Watchnight Service, Salvation Army, Silver Street

NB There will be no meetings of *Stepping Stones* on 18 or 25 December or on 1 January.

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And finally ...

79 steps. Ruth Ball and the bellringers invite members of the congregation to join them in the ringing chamber on New Year's Eve as they ring out the old and ring in the new. Ringing starts at 11.30 pm and finishes at 12.15 am when a glass of wine and mince pies are served.

Please come and join them if you are able!



The Editorial Committee meeting for the January magazine will be held on **Sunday, 10 December**. Would you please ensure that material is with one of the following by that date and if possible not later than Friday 8 November. **We would remind all contributors to the magazine that our final date for entries for January's magazine has to be a week earlier than usual to avoid the Christmas rush.**

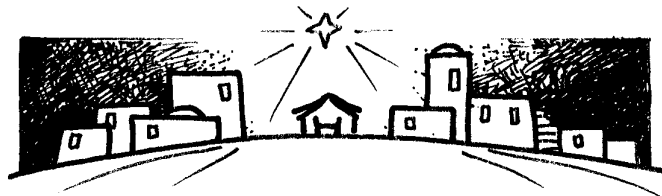
Peter Irving (Editor), 26 Post Street (pjibooks@aol.com)

Lawrence Back (lawrence@lionscorner.co.uk)

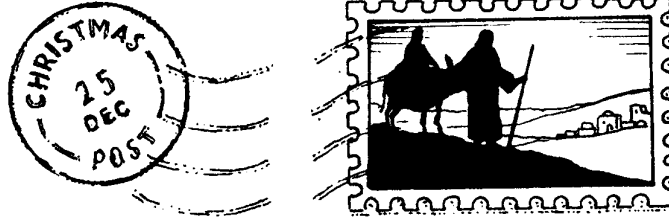
Dorothy Groves (dorothy@groves5812.freemove.co.uk)

Joan Jackson (joan.jackson@ntlworld.com)

Victoria Richardson (DIRandVMR@aol.com)



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