



**Welcome** to the first edition of NWMA News! This is a monthly newsletter of the North Wilts Mission Area, comprising the 31 parishes of the Braydon Book, Draycot, Gauzebrook, Malmesbury and Upper Avon, Upper Thames, and Woodbridge groups.

People sometimes ask me what the Mission Area is really about. Together, we are a body of about a 1,000 Christian believers who meet together in our individual congregations to worship God and reach out into our communities. The bottom line is that we want to reach out with the message of the gospel and the love of Christ to everyone, especially those outside the church family. At the same time we want to help each other to grow in faith and discipleship. *What we are trying to do is to find the things that we can do better together than separately, to share know-how and resources, and to support each other with prayer and encouragement.*

One of the things that we already do well here in North Wiltshire is connect with our communities. *In Bristol Diocese as a whole, engagement with the population (that is, the % of the population included in average weekly attendance) is 1.3%. Within our Deanery, the equivalent figure is over 4%. That's nearly four times better!* So we don't want to lose that close, personal, engagement that each parish has with its community, especially at times like Advent, Christmas and Easter, because this provides us with huge missional opportunities.

One of the things we are going to do together in Lent is to have a focus on caring for God's creation, in the light of issues such as climate change, pollution of the oceans and the pressure on natural resources. As part of this, one of the team in Draycot Benefice has developed a set of six Eco-Challenges for us to try in Lent and is sharing their ideas with the rest of us. We are also going to encourage parishes to organise a local litter pick-up after Easter, perhaps in partnership with other organisations in their towns or villages.

People involved in children's and youth ministry in different benefices have formed themselves into a network – called, appropriately, DYNAMO – to share ideas and plan some joint youth and children's activities. This also makes it much easier to advertise exciting events like Abbey Skate (19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> February) across the Deanery.

Another thing we want to do is to celebrate each other's' successes. I took the picture of snowdrops on the letterhead when I went to Crudwell Church on a Sunday afternoon in late January to a relaunched Family Service. In spite of cold damp weather, several families with young children attended and enjoyed songs, a Bible story where we all had parts to play, and a craft activity, as well as drinks and yummy cake. It was cold outside but inside it was a joyful occasion. Over the page is an example of the way that churches in the Somerfords engaged creatively with their village community this Christmas, using the power of Facebook!

Please feel free to share good news stories of what is happening near you and I will share them in the next newsletter.

Every blessing,

*Catherine*

## Christmas in Woodbridge Group

*The Revd Steve Wilkinson writes:*

“Woodbridge had an unexpected opportunity, with the gift of a knitted Nativity set. I was inspired to send the Mary and Joseph from the set on a journey around a couple of villages, Great and Little Somerford, to culminate at our Christmas Eve 'Great Big Nativity' where I would weave their safe arrival into the narration of the story, and would introduce the shepherds and Magi figures at that point. Intending to start the journey from one of the Carol Services a couple of weekends before Christmas I took Mary and Joseph to that service, explained the plan, and asked for somebody to take them home that night and to find somewhere else for them to go the next night, and so on. This first step was where my plan fell apart as nobody took the opportunity.



So Mary and Joseph came home with me and I turned to Facebook. Within minutes of putting an appeal on the village Facebook page the couple had a new home for the night and I delivered them immediately, asking simply that the host would post a photo of their adventures before passing them on. This is where it really took off. The first hosts ran with the concept and posted several pictures, really entering into the spirit. This then swiftly led to further offers of accommodation, and all I had to do was put the successive hosts in touch with each other. They went to several homes, on the school pantomime trip, to a woodland winter walk, and had a ride on a 'Holly Davidson'. My highlight was when the figures went to the supermarket and were pictured questioning why when people were piling their trolleys up it was also necessary for them to put something into a Foodbank trolley

Over the course of two weeks leading up to Christmas this introduced me to several new people, led to a couple of pastoral opportunities, and raised the profile of our annual Great Big Nativity (not that it needed raising - we already get 300 people from a village of 450!) . In 2020 I will expand it by working with the primary school to provide homes throughout December up to the end of term, and I'll just have to co-ordinate the last few days leading up to the Nativity. Hopefully we'll also be able to send them on a journey after Christmas too.”

### **Your prayer here!**

There is space here for additional prayer requests and thanksgiving. Please let me know if you would like anything included from your benefice or parish in the March edition of NWMA news.

**Please pray for Malmesbury Abbey Skate, 19th-21st February.**