

*And hope does not disappoint us,
because God has poured out his love into our hearts*

Romans 5: 5

Christ Church URC, Marlow

New Forum

Jan - Feb 2022



for



COP26 and Christian Hope – see inside ...

Dear friends

It's almost two years since the UK's first case of Covid-19: 'Patient A' is said to have arrived from China on 23 January 2019. Since then, over 11 million cases have been recorded in this country, almost 150,000 people have died, vaccines have been created in record time and we have been on a roller-coaster ride that few can have imagined at New Year 2019. And, at the time of writing, it feels like 'here we go again'.

I heard a telling phrase on the radio the other week: an epidemiologist said we were 'nearer the beginning of the pandemic than the end.' Possibly not the most cheering of thoughts, but worth reflecting on.

If there has been an upside to recent experience, it has perhaps been in directing our attention to the things that really matter to us. There was much talk early-on of a new community spirit, even if some of that evaporated once restrictions were eased. Many have had reason to be thankful for the help of friends and neighbours, and all of us have surely come to value more deeply the love and friendship of families and close relationships. Have we perhaps also learned again how much we need God's love in our lives?

St Paul tells us in Romans 5 that 'suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope' (NIV). In other translations, 'perseverance' is given as patience or fortitude. Whatever we call it, we certainly need it now! And not just in respect of Covid: thinking back to last autumn's disappointing COP meeting, we seem to be nearer the start of dealing with climate change than the end. Which would be fine if the clock wasn't ticking down so fast.

There are voices, of course, who will tell you that there's nothing we can do about any of this, that we should just put it in God's hands and wait for Jesus to return in glory to sort everything out. I read something rather telling about that, too, last year: to paraphrase, Jesus didn't return to rescue millions of Africans when they were transported across the Atlantic to slavery; he didn't return to rescue Jews from the holocaust, Cambodians from the killing fields or Rwandans from genocide; so why should we expect him to come and sort things out now, just because it's *our* turn to need rescuing?

Looked at that way, hunkering down and waiting for the second coming is a fine case of Western exceptionalism: the belief that we deserve special treatment. Like having 'first dibs' at the vaccine...

So here's a thought for you: perhaps we are nearer the beginning of God's plans for our world than the end. Sorry if that means putting the apocalypse party on hold. But it also means we still have a job to do, don't we? To be, as our Advent candle prayer said, "your light in this your world". Which, as we start another year of uncertainty, sounds like a good thing to focus on.

Martin A

Diary Jan-Feb 2022

January

2nd Carols of Praise on Zoom, joint with Maidenhead URC

9th David will lead our communion service at Christ Church Marlow – *did you find your jigsaw piece? Remember to bring it to this service!*

16th Zoom worship (see details below)

18th Churches Together Unity Supper (see page 7 below)

18th to 25th Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – see page 7 below

23rd David will lead our worship at Christ Church Marlow

30th Joint worship at Maidenhead URC – NO SERVICE AT MARLOW

February

6th Bob Robertson will lead our worship at Christ Church Marlow

13th David will lead our communion service at Christ Church Marlow

20th Zoom worship (see details below)

27th Bradley Croucher will lead our worship at Christ Church Marlow

March

6th Keith Whyte will lead our worship at Christ Church Marlow

Jean Sewell

January 1922 – December 2021

We are sad to record the recent death of Jean Sewell, a long-time member of this church. Jean had very nearly reached her 100th birthday! Her funeral will be at 11.30 am on **Friday 7 January** at Christ Church Marlow, and we hope to include a tribute in the next edition of *New Forum*. The family have requested that people attending the funeral wear bright colours.

Worship at Christ Church Marlow 2022

You are welcome! No need to pre-book your place, but please sign in on arrival. Please use hand sanitiser on entering the church, and please wear a mask at all times in the church including for singing.

We continue to sit encouraging some degree of social distancing in the sanctuary. We are using hymn books. We are still serving both bread and wine for communion.

Refreshments are served after worship downstairs in the hall but please remember to socially distance as much as possible.

If you would like to help with flowers by dedicating the flowers on a particular Sunday, offering to pay for the flowers for a Sunday, or actually arranging them, please speak with Janet. Similarly, if you could help with coffee after church on a particular Sunday, Judith would love to hear from you.

Zoom Sundays – You can use either a computer or your regular home phone. Zoom services are followed by a chance to chat over coffee. It is always the same link and always at 10.30 am:

Topic: Sunday Worship

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82345181397>

Meeting ID: 823 4518 1397

To join Zoom services by phone, please dial one of these two numbers and follow the instructions: 0203 481 5240, or 0203 901 7895.

Tuesdays and Saturdays – all welcome!

House Group continues to meet on the **first and third Tuesdays** of the week at Doreen's house, 2 Baron's Court, Dedmere Rise, Marlow from 10.30 am.

On the **second and fourth Tuesdays** we meet for coffee and a general chat from 10.30 am at the Ark Café, the new coffee shop at Marlow Methodist Church.

Prayer Breakfasts ...

... are normally held in the Cornerstone Room at 9 am on the **Saturday** before Communion services. Please listen to the notices for confirmation of dates. This is an informal time of prayer and chat.

Bella-May



"I'm ready for the New Year, are you?"

Marlow Age Concern has space for more volunteers and new guests. If you know anyone who would benefit from a weekly lunch and chat, or if you have time to cook/wash up (especially on Tuesdays) or would like to just chat to the guests, please contact Laura at marlowageconcern@waitrose.com or 01628 482883.

Churches Together in Marlow

The Ark Café and Cooinda

The Ark Café opened its doors in September, launching a project that began in 2016. Marlow Methodist church wanted to optimise the space within the church as well as reach out to the community. The project received funding from a number of organisations and individuals. The building was renovated and extended, giving a fresh modern look to the one that was originally built in 1900 and last renovated over 30 years ago.

Since opening, the café has welcomed a huge number of people from the Marlow community and beyond, offering a safe, comfortable and welcoming environment for all to share and come together. As well as being a place of sanctuary, the café strives to support local small businesses, to provide affordable high-quality products, and to be as environmentally aware as possible.

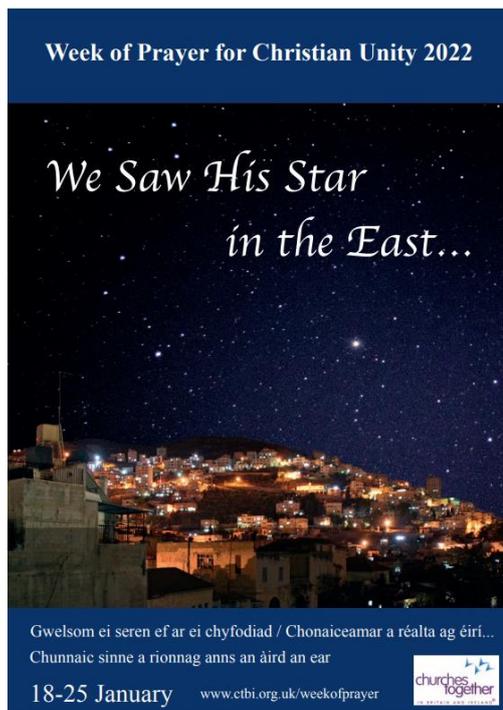


With the support of a team of amazing volunteers led by café manager Jodie, the project has been a huge success from the moment the Open sign was first put out on the pavement. This early success paves the way for further development and support for outreach programs, with the hope to provide everything from critically needed community projects to bringing new job opportunities to the people of Marlow. The Ark Café invites you all to come for a chat, a smile and a cup of coffee, open Monday to Friday from 9 am to 2 pm and, if you would like to join the team, email manager@arkcafe.co.uk .

Cooinda (Aborigine for *Happy Place*) is up and running again! This community friendship centre run by CTM was started over 20 years ago, and it was a great disappointment for regular visitors when the lockdowns came. Cooinda runs on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10.30am to noon and takes place as before in the

Wesley Hall of Marlow Methodist Church. Donations given for drinks etc are distributed to local charities. The Ark Café is in the welcome area of the church, but folk can just come through the café to the hall, where they can have a cuppa and chat with friends. Everyone is welcome!

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 18-25 January 2022



The theme for the Week of Prayer 2022, 'We saw his star in the East and we came to worship him', was chosen by the Churches of the Middle East, and originated from the churches in Lebanon.

It was in the Middle East that the Word of God took root and bore fruit. And it was from the Middle East that the apostles set out to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The Middle East has given thousands of Christian witnesses and thousands of martyrs. Yet now, the very existence of this small Christian presence is threatened.

The Week of Prayer in Marlow will begin with a Unity Supper at St. Peter's School on Tuesday 18 January, when Revd Su McClellan has been invited to speak on behalf of Embrace the Middle East.

During the week from 18 to 25 January, prayer meetings led by different church leaders will be arranged.

'Walk of Life' Project

Marlow has a new wheelchair-accessible public space, and also a place to commemorate loved ones or mark significant life events in a lasting way, both thanks to Christ Church URC and its 'Walk of Life' project. The Walk of Life was opened by Councillor Richard Scott, Mayor of Marlow, on 4 November.



At the ceremony, Revd David Downing prayed for the garden and the path, all those remembered in it and all who will visit it over the years to come. If you would like to have a brick added to the path, the information you need is at <http://walkoflife.moonfruit.com> , or call Martin Ashford on 01628 486227.

Brian Bilston is a clever man. After 'Penguins' in the last issue of *New Forum*, here is another of his poems, a bit more light-hearted this time.

Remembrance of Things Pasta

She blew her fusilli,
my pretty penne,
when she found me watching
daytime tagliatelle.

Je ne spaghetti rien,
I responded in song,
but she did not linguini
for long,

just walked out
without further retort:
a hard lesson to be tortellini,
orzo I thought.

And so here I am,
on my macaroni,
and now my days feel
cannelloni.

Brian Bilston

And now in a more serious mood ... relevant given the commitments made at the recent COP26 in Glasgow.

Every day the planet burns a little more

We only have a short while
So quick, let me tell you
We're too far gone to turn this around
I can't believe
We have it in us to put this world right
It is all too late, too late
How can you say
But do not give up hope
Every day the planet burns a little more
And hot air rises
While governments pump out empty promises
We are powerless
Don't be so foolish to imagine that
Together we have a voice
Big enough to change the world
The decisions we make each day are
Unimportant
The food we eat, the things we buy, how we get around
How naïve to think
The destruction of centuries could be undone
In a few decades
If we could just find reverse

(now read this poem from bottom to top)

Brian Bilston

COP26 and Christian hope

Preaching at Christ Church Marlow at the end of November, Alan Yates gave us some fascinating thoughts about Christian hope. We have his permission to quote some of his sermon below.

Introduction

How did COP26 leave you feeling? Hopeful or hopeless? I guess part of your response will depend on if you are a half-full or half-empty sort of person.

I read an interesting article which tried to put the evolution of human life into the context of earth's timeline. The earth is about halfway through its expected life of 8 billion years. The human race is but a blip in that timeline. We have been around for about the last 300,000 years, i.e. less than 0.01% of the earth's existence. And remember, it is only for the past 6,000 or 7,000 years that have the human race has been doing anything other than grunting!

With unchecked global warming our species will die out, but within 1000 years after that, carbon dioxide and temperatures would probably return to more normal levels and new human life could emerge again ... and this could be a repeated cycle lasting a half to one million years. However, I wouldn't take any drastic action based on that information yet, as this analysis, despite being very interesting, is still highly speculative. However, it does make an interesting interpretation of the second coming, even if it is not biblically consistent!

Jeremiah 33:14-16

So now let us look at our reading from Jeremiah. This hopeful snippet from Jeremiah comes after pages of dire predictions ... because of their sins, and their rejection of the one true God. This passage, foretelling the first coming of Jesus, is the second time it appears in the book of Jeremiah; it is almost word for word a repeat of Ch 23:5-6. It also appears in slightly different forms in Isaiah 9 and 11. The fact this prophecy appears multiple times is not surprising given the timescales ... it is more than 600 years before this prophecy is fulfilled!

Luke 21:25-36

Let's quickly look at our reading from Luke. In some ways this is a strange reading, and some parts are very difficult to understand in terms of their context and meaning.

The majority of the reading explains that we'll know when the messiah is coming again by the cosmic and terrestrial chaos. Today, with our understanding of climate chaos, this has more than a ring of truth to it. However, the difficult bit comes when Luke pronounces in verse 32, 'that this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place'. It is true that people at that time did have an expectation that Christ would come again shortly, within their lifetimes – and this text appears to be very explicit. So, I guess we could say it was just wrongly placed hope; **or** that we have misunderstood its context. In the Tyndale commentary on the text, it is suggested that the prophecy that 'this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place' would already have been wrong when Luke wrote it down ... if we use our traditional meaning of the word 'generation' ... and therefore it would seem illogical for Luke to include such a statement. However, in Tyndale it is also suggested that 'generation' either means all Christ's followers over time (i.e. including us) or all humankind. Consequently, another way of expressing this would be to say there will be an unbroken line of Christ's followers all the way from the first coming to the second coming. In the end for me, this boils down to two points: Christ will come again, and we don't know when.

Message

So, let me try to distil a message for us today. The first coming of the Christ, the Messiah, was a message of great hope; which finally did come to pass, and from which we have benefited ever since. And the second coming is no less of a hopeful message.

We live in times of great anxiety. Few people have escaped the mental turmoil brought about by Covid. If that was our only problem, we might be OK, but we now have additional anxiety brought about by our increasingly chaotic climate.

A few years ago, in the professional change management training I received, I remember being told that ALL human beings (not just 'control freaks') need to have a sense of control over their own lives. This sense of control can come

from actually being in control (which is unrealistic in many aspects of our lives) or from being given the information surrounding our situation. Without this sense of control, we run the risk of being dysfunctional. So, you can see why, in today's environment, many people will be feeling anxious because they are neither in control nor do they have good information.

But Christians are in a slightly different position because we do believe in a positive future, a future with Christ; and the second coming gives us hope.

*Lord Jesus Christ, come into our lives again;
Come in ever new and wonderful ways
And keep us alert to recognise your coming.*

*Thank you, God, for prophets of doom like Jeremiah,
Who open our eyes to shocking realities,
And make us take stock of the danger we are in.*

*Thank you for men and women who listen and take action,
In the attempt to save us from disaster.*

*Thank you for your light breaking through our darkness;
And for Jesus, breaking through the darkness of death itself,
Calling us to follow through self-sacrifice to triumph.*

*Thank you for the hope in your never-waning power of love.
Thank you for faith restored,
Hope renewed and love re-affirmed
Through the continuing proclamation of the Gospel,
Away to the ends of the earth.*

For a recommended short and very interesting read on COP 26:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/29-october/comment/opinion/from-cop7-to-cop26-hype-negotiations-pledges>

Reflection on COP26

This reflection and prayer are written by Jeremy Flack, the Green Apostle for the Eastern Synod and a member of Epping URC

As we witness the impacts resulting from the climate crisis, it can be easy to despair at a lack of action. With most countries having failed to be near achieving their climate commitments, it is easy to question whether COP26 will have any serious effect. I often wonder if the changes we make in our individual lifestyles are pointless if governments and the biggest polluters continue to resist action.

If we are not to give in to the despair that stops us from making positive choices about the way we live, then first and foremost we need hope. This can be the catalyst for change and turn the sacrifices we make into joyful and willing acts.

We can draw on this hope from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour. His resurrection is what confirms our Christian faith, and it is our faith in him that enables us to have hope for the future of the planet.

While we await Christ's return, we are part of a creation groaning in labour pains for the new creation on its way. Our crucial hope is in God's promise to the world, and the one who will, in the fulness of eternity, restore creation.

This does not remove the need to act now. Our hope must not lead to complacency about the scale of the challenge, but truly requires and encourages us to act. This hope extends to events like COP26, that they will find a place in God's purpose for the redeeming of the world. We can hold onto the hope that our efforts for the safeguarding of creation and the serving of those most affected will not be in vain.

Hope is a reason for bold action both at COP26 but also in our own everyday lifestyles, in accordance with God's will for creation. Hope applied to our lives frees us from despair and leads us from inaction to action.

Creator God,

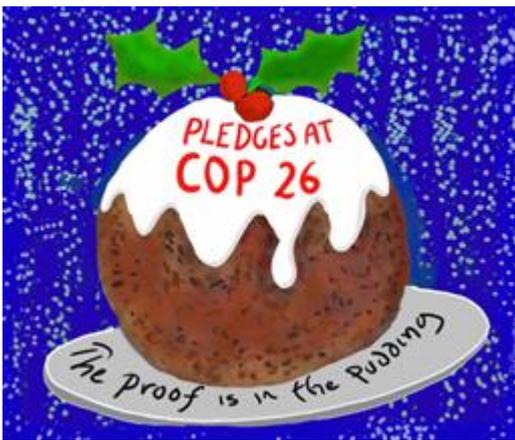
Help us to not fall into despair

when we witness the neglect of your wonderful creation,

but fill us with the hope and desire that each one of us can put things right

and make a difference in caring for the world you love.

Amen



Statement from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church on the conclusion of the Glasgow COP26 summit – 14 November 2021

Significant new statements have been made at the summit in Glasgow. Most government delegations accept that the sense of urgency is greater than it was six years ago at Paris. But ultimately the summit has not delivered. All governments must agree on the necessary actions to avoid 1.5 degrees of warming. The failure of all parties at COP26 to unequivocally support this higher ambition with funding and emission reductions is an injustice towards those whose livelihoods have already been devastated by climate change.

We are deeply disappointed that the language on phasing out coal was weakened at the last moment however the summit has called for the phasing out of 'inefficient' subsidies for fossil fuels. COP26 has also initiated a process to create a fund to help communities recover from loss and damage resulting from severe climatic events. These developments are crucial and welcome, but we

cannot wait for pledges to be reviewed and turned into action every five years. Action must be taken now. The pace and intensity of action must keep up with the science and with the realities experienced by an increasing number of people whose flourishing – now and in the future – depends on the actions that we all take today.

Many of our church partners in developing countries are already experiencing the dire impact of changing weather patterns on livelihoods and food security. Revd James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Council of Churches said as he arrived as a delegate at COP26 that for many in the Pacific Islands, Psalm 137 with its reference to being “By the rivers of Babylon...” has particular resonance. As these communities face exile they experience a sense of loss of identity, loss of sovereignty, and loss of future. At COP26 our churches have listened to and sought to amplify the voices of those in the global South who are critically affected by loss through changing climates.

Our Churches acknowledge that while we live in an age of individuality and immediacy, this is a journey not of individuals but of a community: the people of God and the people of the earth. Whilst individual actions are important, this is a journey that requires us to work together to build a safe and healthy future for all. The involvement of so many sectors of society in COP26 was an inspiration. Sadly, the response of governments is not yet adequate and we call for further actions that respond meaningfully to the magnitude of the emergency that we face.

Revd Clare Downing, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

Barbara Easton, Vice-President of the Methodist Church in Britain

Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Methodist Church in Britain

Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary, Baptist Union of Great Britain

Rev Dr Dave Gregory, Convenor of the Baptist Union Environmental Network (BUEN)

From the Wessex Synod ...

It is with deep sadness that the United Reformed Church announces the death of Peter Pay, Moderator of the URC General Assembly, a former Synod Clerk and an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher who was a member of Salisbury URC.

Mr Pay had been living with a malignant brain tumour for some time and had bravely continued with his commitments until he was forced to step back towards the latter part of the 2021. He died on 18 December.

The Revd Clare Downing, Moderator of the URC General Assembly, said: “Peter has been a valued colleague and friend in various capacities over the years. His clear thinking and ability to ask pertinent questions has been a real asset to the life of the United Reformed Church. He brought a serious mind, tempered by a well-developed sense of humour to dealing with difficult issues. He will be much missed within Wessex Synod, the wider URC, and ecumenical partners.”

Mr Pay grew up in the Kingston upon Thames area where his parents were active in the local Congregational Church. His parents had met and married there, and Peter served the church as a Sunday School teacher in his teens. One of his last commitments as GA Moderator was to preach at his childhood church.

Ecumenicalism became important to him from early in his career: he attended his local Methodist Church while living in Midhurst where he ran a youth club and Bible group.

On moving to Brussels for work purposes, Mr Pay, and his wife Jo, who was brought up in the Catholic tradition, attended a Church of Scotland church.

After returning to Britain, Mr Pay joined Wheatley URC where he was ordained as an Elder and then became an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher and started his work in the wider Church.

He worked for Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI, a former British chemical company) for about 30 years, initially as a marketing specialist in the paints division, and then as a

training manager. Later, he worked as an overseas marketing consultant in ICI's agrochemicals division.

In his final decade with the firm, Peter was based in Brussels managing the training service for all divisions across Europe. In this role, he also worked as a consultant. He worked in more than 50 countries worldwide and was fluent in French.

Mr Pay was granted early retirement at 50 and then spent 12 years working as an independent organisational change and management development consultant.

He served for 10 years as Wessex Synod Clerk, was a Trustee of the URC Trust and of the Wessex Trust, where he served as the Synod Ministry and Mission Fund Secretary.

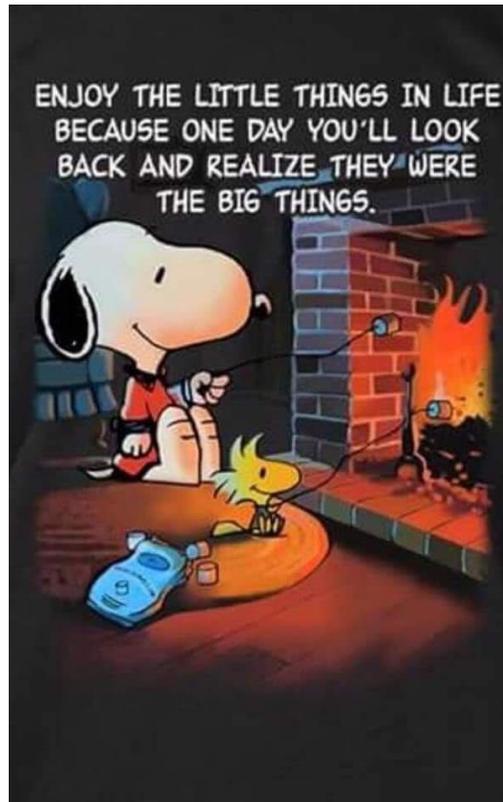
He has served on the church's Training, Learning and Service (TLS) Management Group, Human Resources Advisory Group, Nominations Committee and Mission Committee, including a period as deputy convener.

Mr Pay has assisted with organisational change projects in Wessex, other Synods and at Church House, and remained active in the Wessex Synod's partnership with the Eglise Reformee Unie de France.

He became Moderator of the URC General Assembly, with the Revd Clare Downing, Moderator of the Wessex Synod, in 2020, and remained an active lay preacher.

Peter is survived by Jo, and their four children, Mark, Michele, John and Matthew, and grandchildren. Do please hold the whole family in your prayers at this time.

The Revd Dr John Bradbury, URC General Secretary, said: "I have come to know Peter in the last couple of years, and benefitted greatly from his wisdom as my line manager. I owe him a personal debt of gratitude and have had the privilege of coming to know the quality of his faith, his commitment to service, and the way he brought his considerable acumen and skill from his professional life into the Church. We give thanks to God for all Peter has been to us and hold his family and friends in our prayers as they grieve. May he rest in peace and rise in glory."



A recipe for the new year!

Take 12 months, clean them by wiping all the envy, bitterness, meanness and pedantry off them, and divide them into 30 or 31 parts so that the stock lasts for a year.

Each day should be individually prepared, consisting of one part work and two parts cheerfulness and good humour.

Add three heaped teaspoons optimism, one teaspoon tolerance, a twist of irony and a pinch of tact.

Then pour lots of love all over the mixture.

Decorate the dish with little sprigs of attentiveness and kind gifts, then serve it daily with a smile.

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy year ahead.

Jean



**Christ Church United Reformed Church
Oxford Road, Marlow, Bucks SL7 2NL**

Sundays 10.30 am – Morning Worship
Holy Communion normally every second Sunday in the month

Joint Worship with Maidenhead URC on Zoom
every third Sunday in the month

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New Forum

Please send copy for the next issue to the editor
by Sunday 20 February –
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