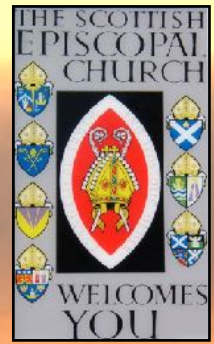


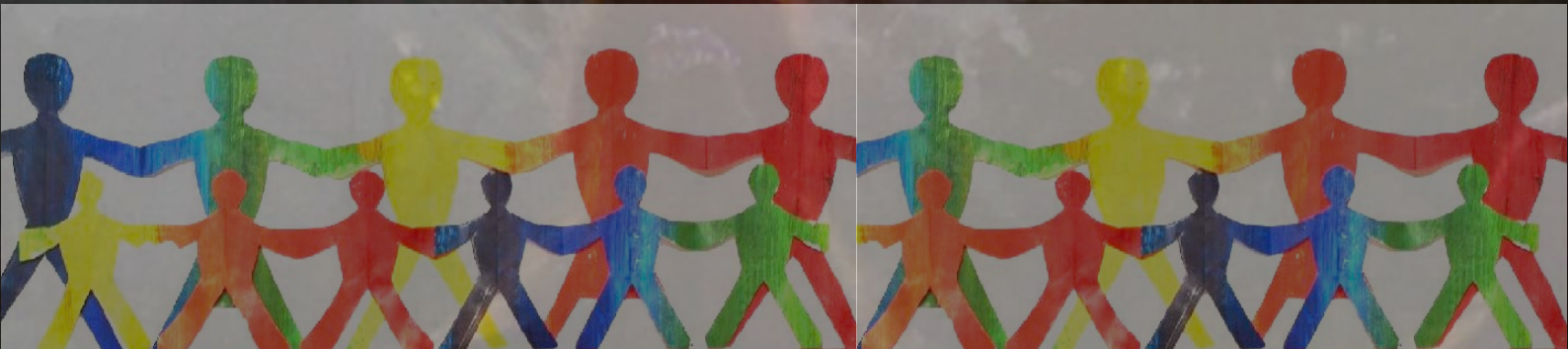
In Touch



*with St James the Less Church, Penicuik
& St Mungo's Church, West Linton*

**A quarterly magazine for all of us
Issue 23 - February 2026**

Lent - Holy Week - Easter - Ascension



Reflections from the Rectory

I love the season of Epiphany. It is full of rich gospel readings, although the time line of the stories jumps around quite a lot, so you need to keep your wits about you as you journey through this season. Many of you will know that I love Luke's story of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. It speaks of a deep faith and trust in God, as we hear the words of Simeon and then of Anna.

This last week I broke with my normal focus on Simeon in my sermon and focussed on the journey of Joseph, Mary and the forty-day-old Jesus from Nazareth to the Temple and back. It reminded me that we are all on a faith journey, and sometimes we travel alongside partners and peers, at other times alongside folk who require care and nurturing. No matter what, we are journeying through our lives, and we may not always be able to walk the path we had consciously or unconsciously envisaged taking. Sometimes that is a good thing, sometimes events out of our immediate control mean we need to walk another path.

When I was reflecting on this it reminded me of Victor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. It guides us to think about how we respond to events that are outside of our control, because all we have in our control is how we choose to respond to them. It is a fairly short book, and, at 160 pages, it is possible to read it at a few sittings. If you are wondering what to do as your Lent discipline, then maybe give up something you already do to find the time to read in Lent. Maybe *Man's Search for Meaning* would be worth a read. Not a usual Lent book, admittedly, but I do think the act of choosing how to respond to situations is part of our faith. Jesus' stories gave examples of choosing to lead with compassion, love and grace, with a concern for the other, whoever they may be. Jesus also was clear that from time to time, if your honest invitations for fellowship or conversation were rejected, the people were cynical and negative, don't carry that weight of cynicism and negativity around with you. Knock the 'dust' (the attitudes and values of the people you have encountered who rejected you) off your shoes, and walk on.

Alternatively, as the Gospel of Matthew is our main Gospel for Sunday readings this year, you could read a chapter a day and still complete it before Holy Week. As you will no doubt have heard me say before, hearing only the short extracts from the bible on a Sunday morning does not always give the context. Nor does it help you appreciate the sweeping narrative that each gospel writer is trying to invoke.

This is not to say that reading short extracts doesn't have its place. Our Monday morning faith development sessions in January have been using five short parables that Jesus told, and have initiated some excellent conversations.

Lent culminates in Passiontide, the two weeks prior to Easter, and the dramatic story of Christ's passion in the last week. May we have travelled with Jesus, joyous at his entry to Jerusalem, saddened and horror-stricken by his death and the desertion of most of the disciples, and then become joyous once more as we rejoice in the Good News of his resurrection. The joy of Easter Day only really erupts in us when we have done the work of that last week. Do travel with us through Lent, and that last week.

Nick Bowry

News from the Congregations

Lighting the Christingles at St Mungo's



This lovely photo was taken at the Family Crib service on Christmas Eve at St Mungo's West Linton. It shows Revd Nick Bowry lighting the Christingles with one of Carna Hodge's granddaughters.

Angus's Baptism

The congregation of St James the Less was delighted to welcome Angus (Angus Soon Zhi Hin) into our church family when he was baptised on Sunday 21 December 2025.

In the photograph (left to right) are Godparents Sarah Topham and Sean Taylor, and parents Charlotte Topham and Wai Cheong Soon. Angus's big brother Aiden (Aiden Soon Zhi Hao) is at the front eyeing up the delicious celebration cake.

Congratulations are also due to the proud grandparents Kathryn and Nigel Topham.



Zachary's Baptism

Another joyful occasion was celebrated on Sunday 1 February 2026.

Dy Harvey's grandson, Zachary Ellis Zikakis, was baptised and welcomed by the congregation of St James the Less. In the photo below, proud parents Richard Zikakis and Rachel McGavin cut the traditional (for St James!) baptism cake, while young Zachary seems not yet to have noticed the goodies in store!



Books Galore ...

For several years, Angela had a bookstall after the service, with funds going to MU, and then coffee fund. She is not able to continue this, and we held a final sale in the hall. Many thanks to those who gave a new home to many of them, and we raised £70 for church funds. The remaining books will be taken for Baldwin Court residents to enjoy, or to a charity shop. Our thanks to Angela for organising the bookstall for so long.

Georgina Phillips



Sticky Gingerbread Recipe

INGREDIENTS

450g plain flour

- 3 level tsp ground ginger
- 3 level tsp baking powder
- 1 level tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 tsp salt
- 225g brown sugar (I use soft dark sugar)
- 185g butter or margarine
- 185g treacle
- 185g golden syrup
- 580ml milk
- 1 large egg beaten
- I add one Tsp each of cinnamon and nutmeg in addition to above.

METHOD

Preheat your oven to 180°C/160°C Fan/Gas 4

- Grease and line a 20cm (8") deep sided square tin
- Sift all the dry ingredients with the exception of the sugar into a large mixing bowl.
- Warm the sugar, butter, treacle and syrup over a low heat until butter has melted.
- Stir all the melted mixture into the dry ingredients, add the beaten egg and milk mixture gradually, stirring all the time.
- Once all the ingredients are combined, beat thoroughly ensuring that there are no lumps in the mixture
- Pour into the prepared tin.

- Bake in the centre of the oven for approximately 1½ hours, until the cake is firm to the touch.
- Cool in the tin for fifteen to twenty minutes and then turn out on to a wire rack and leave to go cold. Wrap in foil (leaving on the greaseproof paper) and store for at least two days (three to four days is better; seven days is even better in my opinion!)
- Cut into squares and serve with or without butter - Enjoy with a cuppa

I sometimes divide the mix into two 2lbs loaf tins. It's a tight squeeze so make sure you don't overfill: use approximately 900g of cake mix per loaf tin.

I use Tesco 2lbs loaf cake liners.

The loaves take about one hour to bake.

The cake freezes well, double wrap in cling film and then tin foil.

Defrost overnight in wrapping and bring to room temperature

This is the recipe for the Gingerbread I bring to church.

Ian Sproule

Congregational Christmas Card

The St James Congregational Christmas Card raised £150 for the Middle East Humanitarian Appeal. Many thanks for your donations.

Gillian Hepburne Scott

St James the Less Fundraising February 2026



Alan and Gill Murray hosted a Pub Quiz on 15 November 2025, which raised £343.30. It was a lovely social evening as well as a fundraiser, and we're very grateful for their support with raising funds for Church projects.

Then 6 December 2025 saw our Christmas Coffee Morning raise £712.07 and was well attended by folks from St James and beyond. Thanks to all who contributed to that event.

The next event in the fundraising calendar will be our annual Daffodil Tea on Saturday 11 April in Trinity Community Church hall, from 10am -12 noon. Please put the date in your diary and come along with your friends and family. Donations of home baking and gifts for the Tombola would be warmly welcomed!

Funds raised at Fellowship Lunches:

7 December for Broomhill Day Centre: £594

4 January for St James projects: £217.42

The Lessons and Carols service and the congregational Christmas card raised: £307.78. This was sent to the Disasters Emergency Committee for Humanitarian Aid to the Middle East.

We, the Fundraising Group, are very grateful for the help and support we receive for our events. If you have any new or different ideas for fundraising, please do get in touch.

Marion Mather

Poetry Please ...

It was gratifying to see a goodly number of folk come along on Saturday, 17 January, to support our Poetry session. An afternoon of shared favourites, pleasant chat, and, of course, tea and cakes – all in a cosy church hall.

We explored a wide range of styles and themes. Childhood memories were evoked by A A Milne and Lewis Carroll; we laughed with Pam Ayres, and pondered with Heaney; war poetry from all periods provided food for thought. We were reminded of the perennial favourites such as Wordsworth and Shelley, Leigh Hunt and Hardy, and introduced to the work of Martin Wroe. One participant contributed an original Haiku, and we were treated to an anonymous offering from a church newsletter on the subject of *Sinning on the Sabbath!* (Ed: see page 22!)

2026 is designated *National Year of Reading*; it seems appropriate to repeat our formula later this year and meet to share our favourite books and writers. Look out for details, and remember it is not a performance, but shared experience.

It is hoped that these one-off, self-run sessions be expanded to include other favourite activities. Little organisation is required: run it past Nick, book the hall, announce to congregation, set up hall and refreshments. Suggestions so far include Family History, Trains, Collectables ...

Do give it a thought – it's good to get together.

Georgina Phillips

Revd Charles Aitchison RIP



On Advent Sunday we invited Revd Charles Aitchison to join us at St James the Less so we could thank him for the generous gift of the beautiful white and gold chasuble. The communion service was dedicated to him for the gift of the chasuble and his years of service in the church as a non-stipendiary priest. It was a lovely occasion, and Charles was touched by the service and seeing some of his ex-pupils from Cornbank School where he was headteacher. He sent me a lovely email afterwards in appreciation for his warm welcome in the church where he had been in the choir and worshipped for many years.

I am sad to advise that Charles died this morning. We pray that he may rest in peace and rise in glory, as a true and faithful servant of our Lord. Please hold his children, Sarah, Christopher and Simon in your prayers.

The congregations of St James, St Mungo's, St Peter's in Peebles and St Andrew's in Innerleithen will all mourn the loss of Charles. It was a pleasure and a privilege to have known him.

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Nick Bowry

Email sent to the congregation Wednesday 3 December 2025

Charles Aitchison

Eulogy

I don't suppose there is ever a good time to lose someone so close and dearly loved as Dad, and losing him at Christmas time is a poignant reminder of the hardships that many people face over the Christmas period.

But the message I want to share with you today is not one of sorrow. It is a message of joy, of love and of inner peace. The words I'm going to share with you are from Charles himself after attending the service here at St James on Advent Sunday.

"Hi Si, just to let you know that the service at St James the Less was a fantastic experience. Nick Bowry the Rector took a most wonderful and beautiful service. At the beginning of the service he showed everyone the Chasuble and told them that it was made especially for yours and Ella's wedding. He then dedicated it to the service of the church. It was very emotional as I received the warmest of welcomes, meeting again former pupils and friends I hadn't seen since before I went up to Durham. David and Valerie McGavin were there and Nick told the congregation of my life long connection to St. James. Chris came and collected me and took me through. It was fantastic meeting old friends Robert and Fay Clerk of Penicuik House, and Isobel Topple from my chorister days. The whole event was simply outstanding. After the service I spent a lot of time talking to old friends and past pupils.

"Amazing. Indeed a red letter day. So special I'll treasure it forever."

(In fact, Dad was so overjoyed, he felt the need to celebrate with not one, but two bar meals, one at the Crown followed by his favourite, The Green Tree. "One thing's for sure, I'm going to eat well... yer a lang time deid").

(Continuing Charles's words)

“Had you all in my thoughts and prayers holding you close during the whole service. Wishing it had been possible for all of us to be there together but we were there bonded in love. An amazing experience to say the least ...

“The welcome was overwhelming. The genuine warmth the friendship taken up naturally from where it left off. It was as if I had seen them the day before. One pupil now about your age had recently been baptized and had turned to Christ. He and his wife are now attending St James. The whole event today was amazing. I'm still tingling from it. The rector is an amazing man. A real people and dog person. He and parishioners who have dogs bring them into the church for the service. They all behaved well during the service. A wonderful relaxing and loving service.”

If ever there was a plan!

As we remember dad, papa, Uncle Charles/Charlie - whoever he was to you - this Christmas and beyond - take with you his great welcome with that wonderful “hello”; his human warmth, sense of humour and ability to find laughter often in the face of adversity; his love of family and friendships; his passion for teaching, helping children to find confidence and reach their potential; his love of food and bringing people together around the table; his great faith and spirituality; his one true love.

Simon Aitchison
(Charles' son)

Taking notice of Sermons

I expect that I'm not alone in sometimes finding it hard to concentrate on every word of a sermon or a reflection.

At bad times, life can be far too busy, hectic, stressful or upsetting to concentrate. At good times (if we're lucky), life can be too exciting remembering nice things we've just done, or anticipating nice things we're looking forward to. In either frame of mind it's hard to concentrate on the words that the speaker has spent a long time thinking about, researching, and struggling over.

But when we're able focus and listen, something is bound to click with us, or make us think in a different way.

A sermon from Revd Nick in 2024 had a bit of an impact on me; likewise one on the same theme from Peter Woodfield in 2025.

Both were about the Lord's Prayer. I've always loved the Lord's Prayer. I love how old it is, how it comes from Jesus' own mouth (as it were), and how Christians have prayed these words through the centuries

In his sermon, Nick said:

"The Lord's Prayer doesn't include any doctrine, or mention substitution, sacrifice or atonement. It may mention God in heaven but does not mention the next life, in heaven or in hell. As Jesus was a Jew you might have thought it would mention the Torah, covenant with God, purity, or at least the Temple. But it doesn't."

"I would contend that this prayer is far more radical than our daily recitations of it may lead us believe. It is a radical prayer of astounding hope for all of humanity, and a manifesto for action. I'm not sure we receive it in that way when we recite it together..."

"The Lord's Prayer, if we pray it rather than recite it, has such a different hold on us. When it is truly prayed it is as if God's Spirit is praying it within and through us. We are praying in the power of the Spirit. But when we pray, are we praying for God's intervention, or is God praying for our collaboration?"

Now there's a thought - **God praying for our collaboration!**

Peter's Sermon included a wonderful version of the Lord's Prayer from the First Nations (involving 25 Native American Tribes), published in January 2022:

*O Great Spirit, our Father from above,
we honour your name as sacred and holy.
Bring your good road to us,
where the beauty of your ways in the spirit-world above
is reflected in the earth below. Provide for us day by day--
the elk, the buffalo, and the salmon.
The corn, the squash, and the wild rice.
All the things we need for each day.
Release us from the things we have done wrong,
in the same way we release others for the things done wrong to us.
Guide us away from the things that tempt us to stray from your good
road,
and set us free from the evil one and his worthless ways.
Aho! May it be so!*

Here's a Celtic style version:

*Holy One beyond all names
Eternal Wellspring
May love rise again in us today
With food for every table
Shelter for every family
And reverence for every life.
Forgive us our failings in love
And free us from all falseness
That the light of our souls may shine
And the strength of our spirits endure
For Earth and all its people
This day, tonight, and forever.
Amen*

According to Google, the Celtic version of the Lord's prayer is by John Philip Newell. John was born in Canada and is Scottish, living in Findhorn. He is "an internationally renowned Celtic teacher and author of spirituality who calls the modern world to reawaken to the sacredness of Earth and every human being." He sounds like a good chap to me!

I guess there might be many other modern versions of the Lord Prayer. It's refreshing and interesting to see and use the Lord's Prayer in these varied and poetic forms. But I'll always prefer the traditional version that I grew up with!

It would be good to hear from you about any bit of any sermon that has struck a chord with you for the next issues of In Touch. You can download sermons for the last two or three years from the church website sermons page, and the previous Sunday's sermon can be seen and read there without needing to download anything (<https://stjamesthelesspenicuik.org/worship/sermons/>).

If you don't do the tech stuff and need a paper copy, just ask me.

Sue Owen

A Scottish Tale

An atheist was spending a quiet day fishing when suddenly his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness monster. In one easy flip, the beast tossed him and his boat at least a hundred feet into the air.. The monster then opened its mouth while waiting below to swallow man and boat.

As the man sailed head over heels and started to fall towards the open jaws of the ferocious beast, he cried out “Oh, my God! Help me!”

Suddenly, the scene froze in place. As the atheist hung in mid-air, a booming voice came out of the clouds and said “I thought you didn’t believe in Me!”

“God, come on, give me a break!” The man pleaded, “Just seconds ago I didn’t believe in the Loch Ness Monster either!”

“Well,” said God, “now that you are a believer, you must understand that I won’t work miracles to snatch you from certain death in the jaws of the monster, but I can change hearts. What would you have me do?”

The atheist thought for a minute and then said “God, please have the Loch Ness Monster believe in You also.”

God replied “So be it”.

The scene started in motion again with the atheist falling towards to ravenous jaws of the ferocious beast.

Then the Loch Ness monster folded his claws together and said “Lord, bless the food You have so graciously provided. Amen”

Contributed by Angela Sibley

Author unknown

Poetry Corner

Morning

A soundless day in December;
Six below and the trees furred with frost,
The ground a snow that was not snow,
A crystallizing of cold.
I went up into the Narnia of the woods,
Making my steps soft, yearning deer and geese.
I heard nothing but my own heart;
Just a shimmering of birds from one tree –
Thirty or forty in a flight that was made of waves.
There among the trees the loch;
A breath of ice had ghosted it,
An ice swivelled with patterns,
As though in the night strange dancers
Had come to skate its stillness.
I stood, scarves of breath woolling the air
As a cloth bell somewhere
Remembered Sunday.

Kenneth Steven

From his book *Evensong*, contributed by Sue Owen

Easter

**When the year is beginning again,
The sleet coming in wet cotton on the wind
To build against the dykes;
And sometimes the sun like a single eye
Blind behind the clouds;
And daffodils, the frail green of them,
Hidden away and hurting in the wind –
I am no longer full of my own emptiness
But just light and sky, listening,
And able to hear at last.**

Kenneth Steven

From his book *Evensong*, contributed by Sue Owen

Peace

“When the world outside is in disarray, and chaos abounds, it is vital that you live the life

You dream of in your own little bubble.

Make the world you want. Kindness, love, patience, acceptance and care.

Throw it around like confetti and create the world you will not see on the news.

You cannot fix the world or change everyone’s mind but you can BE the Peace you seek.

And it is beyond vital that you do.

It spreads like ever-increasing ripples outwards and will find those like-hearted souls you need to reach.

When the world is in unrest, be the peace you seek.

Donna Ashworth

Contributed by Sue Owen

Donna Ashworth is a *Sunday Times* best-selling Scottish poet. She came to prominence in 2020 when her poetry about the UK's COVID-19 lockdown was read in a ‘viral’ video to raise money for the NHS. She has subsequently been credited with helping poetry sales reach record levels in the UK. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donna_Ashworth)

Sin on the Sabbath

We're not allowed to mention Maria Lynn
Since the day she took the silken road to sin.
But I don't mind telling you what we heard
If you cross your heart that you won't say a word!

She washed out an undie on Sunday
And hung it to dry on the sun.
When everyone knows that a Monday's
The day when such things should be done.
She knew it was wrong on the Sabbath
To reveal how a girl is costumed
But she washed out an undie on Sunday,
So we knew that Maria was doomed.

She washed out an undie on Sunday
A fragment of lace and silk blue
Was fluttering there on her clothes line
And it wasn't a petticoat too!
When the minister saw it a-blowing,
A blush on his worthy cheek bloomed,
And he hurriedly rushed to his vestry,
So we knew that Maria was doomed.

She washed out an undie on Sunday
Ignoring the Powers divine,
Who, to punish her, strengthened the west wind,
And blew it away from her line.
A visiting millionaire banker
Was enveloped in silk so perfumed
That we thought he would swoon for a moment,
So we knew that Maria was doomed.

She washed out an undie on Sunday,
And the story cannot be denied
That when he politely returned it,
The brazen girl asked him inside!
She married him yesterday morning
And we feel we must blush for her shame
For she washed out an undie on Sunday
Next Sunday, I'm doing the same!

Anonymous

Contributed by Helen S.



St Mungo's Report February 2026

Vestry was able to meet on 24 November 2026 and our AGM was held in January. Our reduced numbers are making it difficult to achieve a quorum at both Vestry meetings and General meetings so we have taken the first steps to amend our constitution to have smaller quorums.

At our AGM, Carna Hodge stood down from Vestry and was thanked for her contribution. As a result, the St Mungo's Vestry is down to four members plus Nick: Ian Kerry, Alan Cameron, David King and Susie Compton. Once again St Mungo's made an operating loss, but to some extent this was compensated by an increase in the value of our investments and the charge is financially secure in the medium term.

The numbers at Sunday morning worship remain low. However, as before, there was a great turnout for our Christmas Eve crib service and it is great to know that St Mungo's still does have a strong connection with the village.

Ian Kerry

St James the Less Vestry Notes January 2026

The Annual General Meeting took place on Sunday 7 December 2025 in the Church Hall prior to the Fellowship Lunch, and was well attended. Draft minutes from the AGM have been circulated to the congregation by email for their comments and feedback.

An informal meeting of the Vestry was held on Tuesday 6 January 2026. At this meeting, two new members were warmly welcomed to the Vestry, while appreciation was expressed to those who were retiring from their roles. The Vestry also took the opportunity to discuss and set out the priorities for the coming year.

- Priorities for 2026
 1. Updating the Mission Action Plan (MAP) to ensure it reflects current needs and aspirations.

2. Upgrading the church heating system, with the aim of completing the work by autumn 2026.
3. Addressing the actions highlighted in the recent Quinquennial Report to maintain the church fabric and facilities.
4. Implementing recommendations outlined in the Fire Safety Report to enhance safety for all users of the building.
5. Reviewing the congregation profile to gain a clearer understanding of the community's composition and needs.
6. Developing a marketing and social media strategy to strengthen communication and outreach.

It was acknowledged that these priorities will require significant financial resources. Even if grant applications are successful, St James will still need to look at new ways to increase income to support these important projects.

- Additional Vestry Decisions

1. It was agreed to purchase three soup kettles to keep soup hot during the Fellowship Lunches.
2. A bring-and-share lunch will be held after the service on Music Sunday, 14 June 2026, in celebration of this special occasion. As a result, there will not be a Fellowship Lunch on the first Sunday in June.

- Other Matters Discussed

The Vestry also discussed the condition of the car park, issues around parking in the lane, and the purchase of a new notice board.

- Next Meeting

The next Vestry meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 3 February 2026.

The Vestry extends its best wishes for a healthy, peaceful, and happy 2026 to all members of St James and the wider community.

With love,

Charlotte Kemp
Vestry Secretary
1st November 2025

Last Word

I want to thank all of you who have responded with kindness and love following Misty's death last week. She was with me for three years minus three days. Shorter than I would have wished for, but over the weekend of 24th and 25th January she was very unwell, and the hardest but I believe the right decision was to put her to sleep. She had been a faithful companion, loved the congregations - and not only the ones with treats for her, although she did reserve her little dance and whimpers of joy for these people - and brought her own sense of calm with her. She was a true evangelist, not using words at all, but through her calm presence she enabled conversations and invitations to happen. I will miss her, and I know many of you will too.

This last week I have also sat at the bedside of someone who is terminally ill, and I said the prayers contained in the liturgy some will recognise as the 'Last Rites'. In my own prayers, meditations and reflections, I explored my feelings about assisted dying for humans in the last weeks of life compared to my experience of holding Misty as she was euthanised. It is a complex issue and I pray for wisdom for those who have responsibility in the Scottish Parliament and also in Westminster for finalising the legislation and deciding whether it should be allowed or not, and under what conditions.

Luckily, this last couple of weeks I have also met two couples planning to get married, and have officiated at a lovely baptism. Ministry is full of all these aspects of our lives, and it is a privilege to be alongside people at the joyous and the saddest of times.

Nick Bowry



Misty enjoying the Lessons and Carols Service at St James the Less

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For donations to any of the causes mentioned in this issue, please contact the treasurer for St James the Less, John McCulloch ([treasurer\[at\]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org](mailto:treasurer[at]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org))

Websites

St Mungo's: <https://stmungoswestlinton.org/>

St James the Less: <https://stjamesthelesspenicuik.org/>

Next Deadline

Please send copy to Sue Owen at the email address below by **Sunday 5 April 2026**

The next issue of *In Touch* will be distributed on **Sunday 26 April 2026**

Email: [intouch\[at\]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org](mailto:intouch[at]stjamesthelesspenicuik.org)