



DOWNING PLACE  
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH  
CAMBRIDGE

## PLACE MATTERS



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This month's *Place Matters* takes us beyond our normal horizons into the world church.

I am more grateful than I can say that the years I have spent serving the United Reformed Church have given me many opportunities to go beyond my normal horizons into various parts of Christ's global body. And everywhere I have learned much; I have received rather more than I gave, and I would like to use this month's letter to tell of three ideas I have gleaned whilst overseas.

In *Johannesburg*, an essential core of African spirituality was both taught and demonstrated. It is *ubuntu* – best translated as 'I am because you are', or 'a person is a person because of other people'. On the one hand, I discovered that this urged me to be aware of my own incompleteness without other people – 'no-one is an island entire of itself', as John Donne has it. On the other, that we grasp something fundamental to being human when we realise that another person's need is my responsibility, not so much as a duty, but as a delight.

In *Matanzas*, on Cuba's northern shores, I visited an ecumenical seminary for students from more than a dozen denominations. There I encountered the '*theology of the absurd*'. We were told it draws on the thinking of Habakkuk, who was writing more than half a millennium before Christ, when the Babylonians were striving to dominate the Middle East. Surrounded by oppressors and injustice, the prophet nonetheless expresses confidence and joy because of God. The absurdity is that 'though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vine, yet', says Habakkuk, 'I will rejoice in the Lord'. (3.17) In a Cuba that was still in thrall to Fidel Castro's secular rule, and where the church was barely tolerated, that trusting of God's Jesus-defined goodwill and purpose was, yes, absurd, and yet also the vocation of the Church.

And this summer, I learned something deeply affecting from the First Nations people I met in Ohsweken, Ontario. I was taken to meet representatives of those people who were in Canada long before the settlers arrived early in the seventeenth century. First of all, I was struck by the similarity between Africans' *ubuntu* and the First Nations' Mohawk saying, 'All my relations'. Then, though, I listened to how still today the First Nations people have but a small fraction of the land they used to have, or even were promised in treaties of the 1780s. But I did not hear bitterness. Sadness and frustration, yes, but then, with a gentle spirit

that I will forever remember, Rhonda and Yvonne told me that their people's regret was not that the settlers stole land from the First Nations people, but that they wouldn't share it. They said that the settlers couldn't have stolen it from them, because it wasn't theirs either. It belongs to Creator. All of us have it in trust, and we are called to share it.

'I am because you are',  
the 'theology of the absurd' and  
a desire to 'share'.

What a treasure trove of ideas to nourish our own understanding! Maybe they are not brand-new ideas to all of us, but they will be to some. And new or not, they are eloquent voices from afar, which by their novelty have a freshness of relevance for our situation in the bewildered and bothered Britain of this Brexit moment.

Whatever our constitutional relationship to the European Union, we are because they are. Our stories, our economies, and our wellbeing are inextricably linked.

Key to our future thriving and peace will be the readiness to focus upon the truth that everything we have is on loan from Creator, and any trade agreement is successful if its heart is commitment to a generous sharing.

And how welcome the word of Habakkuk. To be people of faith is not to be **exempt from life's conundrums, less still from political upheaval**. Cubans have known that for decades. Rather, even as the fig tree does not blossom, it is to **trust God's reliably covenanted love, as we see it best in the living and dying and rising of Jesus Christ**.

The world church was once something to which we went with treasure to offer. With a servant-shaped sensitivity in this post-imperial generation, we can still do that. But today the traffic goes both ways. As a nation, and as Downing Place Church, do we not have much to gain from allowing the global church to inform our understanding of what it is to be human, what it is to be faith-ful, and what it is to live as one sharing people?

*Nigel Uden*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of *Place Matters* focusses on the work of the *World Church and Public Issues* group in Downing Place Church. We learn about several of the international charities which Downing Place supports, and also about the work of Commitment for Life, our special cause for October, and about Bangladesh, the subject of our World Church weekend Harvest Supper on October 11<sup>th</sup>.

Thanks are due to several members of the World Church group for their contributions and their help with this issue. We hope you find it interesting and enjoy reading it, and that you will come along to the Harvest Supper to see the **Bangladesh exhibition and learn more about Christian Aid's work in Bangladesh**. Details later in this issue.

### DOWNING PLACE WORLD CHURCH AND PUBLIC ISSUES GROUP

This newly named group, previously the Downing Place World Church and World Mission group, seeks to raise awareness within Downing Place about world church and public issues. It aims to:

1. initiate and foster international church relationships
2. be aware of the activities of International Church bodies of which the URC is a member
3. raise awareness of issues of social justice, economic and environmental concern, enabling the congregation to engage in these issues
4. further the promotion of discipleship and the life of Downing Place United Reformed Church outside the Church context (where appropriate, in conjunction with other groups)
5. coordinate the work of Commitment for Life and Christian Aid within Downing Place (a Christian Aid coordinator being appointed and an ex-officio member of the group)
6. determine which issues and organisations we actively seek to support at any one time.

This group brings recommendations to church members of how funds available to charities and special causes should be distributed on behalf of the congregation.

Dr Simone Maghenzani is the Convenor, Madeline Impey our representative for Commitment for Life, Sheila Porrer is Christian Aid coordinator, and other members of the group bring special interest gifts.

As with all the groups, anyone is very welcome to attend the meetings, which **take place about four times a year, at present at Pamela Cressey's house. Dates** are published in the Weekly Diary.

World Church Weekend will be celebrated with a Bangladeshi evening and meal on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October and a Harvest Festival service led by the WCPI group on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October.

On the following pages, you can find out more about a number of international charities which have been supported by Downing Place.

## Action on Disability and Development – ADD International

### Power to the Global Disability Movement

An estimated 1 billion people are living with a disability across the world.

Disabled people living in poverty in developing countries are among the most marginalised and stigmatized people on earth. Often they have no access to basic human rights, education, or the opportunity to earn a living.

In the face of hostility and oppression, organisations of disability activists are working to tackle stigma, transform attitudes and create positive, lasting change for disabled people. Right now, ADD International is partnering with disability activists to help break the cycle of poverty and exclusion of disabled people. At the heart of the work of disability activists, and their organisations, is the drive to increase the engagement of disabled people at all levels of society – within families, communities, service providers and powerholders.

ADD is supporting disability activists in Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Bangladesh and Cambodia. **Their courage and determination deserves the world's attention and resources.**

Downing Place recently sent £1 000 from the York St. fund to support ADD's work. More information available at [www.addinternational.org](http://www.addinternational.org) , and I have appropriate literature.

*Ted Dennison*

### The Amos Trust

Downing Place URC has given support on a number of occasions to this small but very effective, Christian development organisation. It was founded by Garth Hewitt over 25 years ago and supports justice projects in Bethlehem; climate change in Nicaragua; Street Children in Durban in South Africa and in Chennai, South India.

When I participated in the Amos Trust Alternative Pilgrimage to Palestine last October one visit was to a home that had been rebuilt earlier in the year, following Israeli demolition. We were welcomed with great warmth. Then we walked up the hill to see a pile of rubble, the home of a young family that had been bulldozed just a week before. All their worldly goods were stacked in a frame tent, issued by the UN. A shipping container, provided by a European consortium, stood nearby, being transformed into a temporary home for the



coming winter. Despite their situation, the couple welcomed us graciously with coffee and smiles. The recent issue of Words of Hope, the newspaper from Amos Trust, reports on the rebuilding of their house by local and Amos Trust volunteers last April. 'It was not just the demolition of a home built with stones, but the demolition of every hope, every dream built with every stone.....



When I saw the new house “I thought that’s my home, just like a dream. Beautiful”, said the young woman. A tiny act in the face of the horrendous ongoing demolition programme, but a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian people in the face of terrible injustice.

The well-established Street Child World Cup was an initiative of the Amos Trust’s partner in Durban, Umthombo, which we have supported. This year saw the first Street Child Cricket World Cup, mostly played in Cambridge but the thrilling final in which India beat England, played at Lords. Imagine going back to your pavement home in Chennai having captained the winning team! Even the local police have a new perception and that is precisely the aim of these international Street Child gatherings, - changing perceptions.

*Chris Wright*

### Aquaid Lifeline Fund

This Cambridge-based charity was one of our special causes for this year. Here is a summary of what Stephen Thornton wrote about it in June: Aquaid provides residential care and day care for orphans, and many other activities for poor communities in Southern Malawi, including the 'Dawn Centre', **rural Malawi’s only residential facility caring for children with physical and learning difficulties**. Aquaid also provides vocational training for orphaned young people, many of whom go on to serve their communities as teachers, nurses, doctors, clinical assistants, car mechanics and chefs. Aquaid also runs two primary and two secondary schools and a number of health clinics. All its Malawi-based staff, bar one, are Malawian and all the money it raises in the UK is sent overseas.

## CamCrag

CamCrag - Cambridge Calais Refugee Action Group - is a charity organisation registered in 2016 to bring relief to refugees in Calais, Dunkirk and in other areas where people are camped in makeshift shelters as they try to enter Britain. A dedicated team of weekend volunteers goes every six weeks, distributing supplies of food, clothing, sleeping bags and tents, phones and torches, including fresh food for the emergency kitchen run by two local groups, Help Refugees and l'Auberge des Migrants, at their warehouse. Donations of useful items (listed on their website) and money are collected locally for the convoys. Other volunteers make ponchos and tents, and publicise the work here. Our support for CamCrag is an important practical witness to our caring for those in distress, as they flee from persecution and try to start a new life as refugees.

*Pamela Cressey*



## Feed the Minds

Feed the Minds is an ecumenical, international charity that has been delivering education projects since 1965 in some of the world's most marginalised communities. They enable vulnerable people to transform their own lives by acquiring vital skills and confidence, helping to overcome problems such as poverty, discrimination and living in post-conflict societies. Their projects vary from raising awareness of the harmful effects of female genital mutilation in Kenya to delivering agricultural training in Sierra Leone following the Ebola outbreak and improving health knowledge in Nepal to reduce maternal and child mortality rates.

As a charity with Christian roots, Feed the Minds recognises the vital role that the Church can play in community transformation. They know that church leaders in the global south need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to support their communities. Feed the Minds are grateful to Church supporters for financial support, gifts in kind, advice, enthusiasm and belief in their vision, to help break the cycle of poverty for individuals for individuals, families and whole communities.

*Ted Dennison*

## House of Rainbow

Downing Place have also supported *House of Rainbow*, which is an inclusive, welcoming and affirming religious community for all people but especially LGBTQ+ people from BAME backgrounds. It works in many parts of the world, especially where sexual and racial minorities are discriminated against. Its International Director is Jide Macaulay, a Nigerian pastor, now a priest of the Church of England. Jide Macaulay visited Cambridge in February 2018 and preached at a Joint Service for the former Emmanuel and St. Columba's.



## Jiroff, Gambia – new buildings for the primary school

In 1989/90 a team of Scouts from the UK spent five weeks in a small Gambian village, Jiroff. Whilst there they built a school block, an addition to the primary school. Twenty years later, a second visit to the village found that the school building was showing its age, and a decision was made to rebuild. In consultation with the village it was determined that what the school really **needed was teachers' accommodation. Normally, teachers are expected to billet** with a family which can make it difficult to find space to work and prepare lessons. In 2009/10 a fresh team of Scouts from Cambridgeshire and some sixth formers from Morrisons Academy in Perthshire went to Jiroff to undertake the work. It was realised that the foundation plinth that the building stood on was sound and could be used to erect the accommodation block. This was completed and it stands today as a successful project that has encouraged teaching staff to come out from the capital, Banjul, to teach the young people of our village. One downside: the nearest toilet is 300 yards away, so last year we decided we should build a small block, exclusively for the teachers' use.



The foundations of the new toilet block currently being prepared.

We opened the teachers' accommodation at Jiroff primary, in The Gambia, in 2010. The accommodation has proved very successful and attracts teachers from the capital, Banjul, because they have their own room and do not have to billet with a village family. We now propose a further development, a toilet within the accommodation compound.

Currently the teachers need to walk to the school toilet block. This is not an inviting prospect, especially during the night - Gambia still boasts some rather large Hyena!! The block, which will consist of two cubicles, will also offer some degree of privacy as it will be enclosed and not available to the children at the school.

Downing Place URC has provided £1000 towards the cost of £2500. With a further generous, individual, donation of £1000 we now have the funds to complete the task, this will be done in November this year and we will use labour drawn from some of the young people in the village.

*George Devine*



Teacher accommodation built with our support in 2008/9

## MAP – Medical Aid for Palestinians

In 2018 Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) appealed for paediatric physiotherapists to go to the Gaza Strip to help provide teaching to physiotherapists there. I applied and entered a whole new world.

MAP is a non-political, non-religious, non-sectarian humanitarian organisation working to improve medical care for Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the refugee camps in Lebanon. One of the particular challenges for those living within the Gaza Strip is the blockade on free movement. While causing many difficulties in day to day life, it also means that their **physiotherapists can't travel to get the best possible training. MAP has sought** to address this by sending physiotherapists to provide this training.

With a colleague, Sioned Davies from Countess of Chester Hospital, I travelled to Gaza City, crossing through the concrete walls, check points and refugee camps and met the most amazing group of MAP and local health workers, providing the best care they can in very difficult circumstances.

We faced many challenges – the lack of supplies (medicines are seen as luxuries and can only be given for short periods), only four hours of electricity a day (generator fuel at the time was being blockaded and the Intensive Care Units were a few days away from running out of power for their ventilators) and bombing – but the reality for those living and working there was much more difficult. Powered by lack of sleep, Gazan coffee and falafel we visited hospitals, traded treatment tips and provided three days of intense training. We also saw the benefits that MAP has brought. I specialise in working with children after major physical trauma and everywhere there was evidence of the fantastic work that MAP has done in providing training, support and equipment for clinicians working with this unfortunately all too common group in Gaza. We also spent time in the neonatal intensive care unit, which MAP had provided with training and equipment to help the tiniest residents of Gaza.

Thanks to continuing fund raising, Sioned will travel again to Gaza with other physios, doctors and midwives to teach colleagues there, hoping to improve care for such wonderful people in an extremely difficult situation. Not to mention the lobbying, supplies and logistical help MAP brings! Thank you again for your fund raising. It is making a difference.

For more information on our work please see below:

<https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/910-developing-physiotherapy-care-for-gazaas-youngest-generation>



Our Visit to a Neonatal Unit

*Colin Hamilton (son of Ken and Kathy Hamilton)*

## Mediterranean Hope

Mediterranean Hope is an ecumenical Church charity supporting refugees fleeing to Europe. It is an initiative of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (including the Waldensian Church) but the Catholic Church is also involved. Italy of course is very much in the front line of the refugee problem, taking in thousands of people who have crossed the Mediterranean from North Africa.

Its work consists of three strands. First, awareness. This means raising the profile of refugee issues, drawing attention to their needs and their vulnerability, and combatting the right-wing ideology which refuses help to migrants and even seeks to ban rescue missions which save migrants from drowning.

Second, humanitarian corridors. The charity sets up routes by which migrants can reach Europe safely and avoid the people traffickers. It helps people with paperwork and immigration rules, arranges transport and a welcome.

Thirdly, it provides centres where migrants can be housed safely when they arrive, until a permanent home can be found. (Government help to asylum seekers is minimal – one set of clothing, not even a change of underwear, and a toothbrush.) Mediterranean Hope supports especially women and children, often using premises owned by the Waldensian Church. It first provides shelter, food, and clothing, then arranges schooling, training and eventually jobs and a place in society. Downing Place URC has in particular supported **this strand of the work, contributing to ‘La Casa delle Culture’ (The House of Cultures)**, a centre for refugee minors in Scicli, Sicily. Nigel Uden and Simone Maghenzani visited there in 2018.





Evening Meal at Mediterranean's Hope house in Scicli, Sicily prepared by refugee residents; in the background, a painting by refugees, depicting their boat rescued from the sea by the hand of God.



A cross in Noto Cathedral, made from the remains of a refugee boat.

(Thanks to Nigel for these pictures)

## Christ Anointed Church, Ghana – a thank you

The National Chairman, Elders and members of Christ Anointed Church would like to express our sincere gratitude to Downing Place Church, Cambridge, UK, for their kind on-going support for the church in Ghana, which is improving not only the spiritual but also social life of the people.



Thanks to Downing Place Church, Christ Anointed Church, Agomanya, Odumase-Krobo, Ghana, among other great things, now has a well, which provides valuable, life-saving, good drinking water not only for the members of the church, but also for the whole neighbourhood. The Sunday School also now has a well-equipped building, which has increased the number of children who attend the church. Even children of parents who worship at other churches attend the Christ Anointed Sunday School.

The Christ Anointed Church has also been blessed by personal visits from Ministers and Elders of Downing Place Church, not least the Rev Keith Riglin, the Rev Martin and Dr Pamela Cressey, and the Rev Nigel Uden, whose inspiring sermon on the Lord's Prayer has now become a model for the pastors and anthem for the church. We should be very grateful for more such visits. They enhance the profile of the church.

We should also be grateful for further assistance to upgrade the forecourt of the Sunday School to stop it becoming a quagmire whenever it rains, which is unhealthy and even dangerous for the children.

We greet you and thank you in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

“In the following pages you will find something about recent work done by CfL and their Christian Aid partners in Bangladesh. Then Janet Bottoms writes about Bangladesh and its problems, and her own memories of growing up in that region.”



## GOLDEN DREAM

Major flooding from the sea over 70 kilometres away, has left the ground unusable in a small village in South West Bangladesh. Christian Aid partner, The Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh, worked with the villagers to find ways to help them should flooding happen again. Previously flood water drained away naturally but a dam was built to stop sea water **entering the delta. This altered the flow so now water can't drain away** sufficiently, leaving the ground salinated and unable to sustain crops. At one point the people dug up the bulbs of water hyacinths or lilies to eat. They are not nutritious but fill up the stomach.



IMAGE© Commitment for Life  
Shova Biswas speaking for the forum

The first thing CCDB suggested was to set up the Sonalir Shopnaw Mohila forum. The forum members were then encouraged to build a small hut to meet in and to decide what they felt was needed for their community. This process has taken a while but now the hut is well used for climate change adaption training and basic literacy. Inside they keep books on climate change, a megaphone to use as an early warning system, torches, bottles of water and a radio. The forum members meet once a month to discuss any current issues and are well informed about climate adaptation.

The first project involved raising the platform for the pump to 6ft above ground level. This means that if a flooding happens the villagers can still get water. CCDB have given the forum saline tolerant seeds and encouraged them to diversify away from crops. They have also tried growing turmeric on floating gardens made from layers of water hyacinths.

The Vice President of the forum, Shova Biswas, explained how she had been in the forum for 3 years and how support and training from CCDB has changed their lives.

**“We have been able to save money and become more self-reliant through selling fish and chickens. We are using saline resistant seeds but the yield is not always so good. They have made us more aware of the issues and the benefits of working together. CCDB also helped with some basic education. Now, I can write a little English and read Bangla. This helps my children.”**

Shova hopes one day that she can travel and tell her story. **“Being a lady from a poor area we have already gained and, in the future, can gain more. This forums name means ‘Golden Dream’ and I hope our dream will be fulfilled.”**

## BRINGING JOY

It is always good to hear how the training and help from Christian Aid partners has changed lives and brought joy. Here are a few messages from forum members in South West Bangladesh, supported by Christian Aid partner Shushilan.

Kazol Mondol

**“People are willing to learn. This is very important. I hear what is being said at meetings so, with the training, I can go and try it out and then help others. This is making life good.**



## Hadondada Mondal

“Before Hurricane Aila hit us we used to get a good crop but, after Aila, the crops were not healthy and the yield low. Through Shushilan we have learnt to adapt. This has helped us to stay here. Now we use less seeds as we measure our fields out. First, we prepare the beds, then we sow the seeds and then plant them out in rows. Through this system nothing is wasted. Earlier it was haphazard but now we put them 6 inches apart in straight rows. It is simple and it reduces the fertilizer and makes it easier to harvest.



## Gogonananka Kaman Monda

“We have benefitted from production training. Now we go to market first and negotiate the price before we bring the produce. If it is a good price, we take the crop to the buyer. We negotiate and this make us proud.”



## Karuna Raptan

**Karuna has been involved in fish cultivation.** “Earlier I went about it in an unplanned way. After a year and one harvest I was taught to clean the pond, then put food in with the new fish eggs. This has meant I have double and sometimes triple the yield than I had before. I use snails as food. I break the shells and mix with sand, dust, straw and use as food and fertilizer.” Blowing a shell to make a noise is a sign of joy in Bangladesh. In this community forum that sense of joy is palatable, especially among the women playing a full part in the business and work.



## বাংলাদেশ Bangladesh

Bangladesh , “the country of Bengal”, has both a long and a short history. As a region of the Indian subcontinent, Bengal was ruled for centuries by Buddhists before becoming part of the Mogul Empire, at which point the majority of the population became Muslim. It was under the control of the British from 1757 until June 1947, with the granting of Independence followed by the bloody Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. This created a Pakistan made up of two predominantly Muslim regions approximately 1,300 miles apart, Twenty-five years of increasing resentment by the East against the much larger West Pakistan reached boiling point in 1971, and after a bloody nine months war the Republic of Bangladesh was born.

**Bangladesh is the world’s 8th-most populous country and one of the most densely-populated.** Its people come from a range of ethnic and religious groups. As might be expected, it enjoys an equally diverse culture, including music, dance, literature, folk lore and festivals as they have evolved over centuries of change and interchange within Bengal and the wider languages and **cultures of the Indian subcontinent.** **Though it is the world’s third largest Muslim majority country,** the right to freedom of religion is part of its constitution and its four religious national holidays are Christmas, Eid ul-Fitr, **Buddha Purnima and Durga Puja.** **The nation’s staple food is rice, served with curries and with thick lentil soup or dahl.** Curries may include fish - the primary source of protein - or meat, but among the poor they are most often vegetable. The gap between a fast-growing middle-class and the poor is still very obvious.

Life for the majority of Bangladeshis is shaped by the geography and climate of Bengal. Most of the country consists of the flat plain of the Bengal delta, threaded by the many tributary rivers of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, and generally less than 9 metres (30 ft) above sea level. This is the major rice and **jute growing area, but includes a huge, marshy expanse of the world’s largest mangrove forest,** listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The north eastern region of Sylhet is hilly, and a tea-growing area, while the south, bordering Myanmar, is mountainous and forest-covered and once the home of a tribal people quite different from the Bengalis.

The most powerful influence on the lives of everyone in Bangladesh is the seasonally changing pattern of the monsoon which consists of a dry, increasingly hot season, with some light rain in March that softens the ground

enough to allow ploughing and planting, and the abrupt arrival of the heavy monsoon rains lasting from about mid-June to October. This pattern can vary, however, and these variations have recently become more serious. Small-scale flooding of the paddy (rice) fields is vital irrigate the land and a delay of even a few days in the arrival of the monsoon, or a break within it of a week or more, can lead to water shortages and agricultural drought. On the other hand if the rains are very heavy they can cause floods that wash away not only the river banks but roads, houses, livestock and livelihoods and result in major loss of life.

As well as the problems caused by changing weather and rising sea levels for such a flat, low-lying land, Bangladesh is struggling to deal with the recently recognized, wide-spread poisoning of the drinking water with arsenic. It is said that the scale of this disaster is greater than any seen before, including the accidents at Bhopal in 1984 and Chernobyl in 1986. Sadly it was created out of well-intentioned attempts to deal with the previous problems of surface water sources being contaminated with micro-organisms that caused potentially fatal diseases, particularly among infants and children. Attempts were made to counteract this problem by sinking large numbers of tube-wells to a depth of nearly 200 metres. These seemed a highly successful way of providing a majority of the population with “safe” drinking water until the first signs of what proved to be arsenical poisoning began to appear and tests showed that the water from a large number of them was contaminated to a high level with arsenic from a natural geological source. Many of the wells, all individually tested, are now sadly locked and marked as not to be used. The effects of poisoning include not only a variety of internal cancers but also all-too-visible skin lesions that have led to fear and hostility towards the sufferers in many places, with tragic results, particularly for women.

Despite such problems Bangladesh has made progress in many ways such as life expectancy, maternal and child health and gender equality since its birth in 1971. Although still dogged by corruption and sporadic violence, continuing poverty, illiteracy and a lack of health care, it is a democratic republic with a sense of its own place on the world stage, and showed a willingness to provide refuge to the more than 700,000 Rohingya people who fled from Myanmar which was remarkable in such an impoverished and over-crowded land.

*Janet Bottoms*



## Waterland: memories of childhood in Bengal

“Waterland” was what my father called the region around the city of Barisal, in the southern delta region of Bengal. I had actually been born in Calcutta, India, the child of Baptist missionaries, but have very few distinct memories earlier than 1947 when we returned from a short stay in England to live in Barisal, in what was by then East Pakistan - now Bangladesh.

Barisal is on a right-angled bend in one of the many rivers that form the deltaic plain and at that point is half a mile wide. I was not particularly aware of this until the first time I saw the Thames, in England. I had heard this spoken of as “great” river and I remember being very disappointed by it. I could see the other side! From Barisal all that I had ever been able to see across the river was a line of fires indicating villages burning in one of the sporadic outbreaks of Muslim/Hindu violence that could still occur several years after Partition. As children we saw very little of this, though I remember a couple of girls who had run away from a mob and came to my father for help. We hid them until he was able to reconnect them with their family, and I took bananas to them in their hiding place. A more serious sight was a Hindu who had been badly beaten up and whose wounds were attended to by our Muslim cook. Such times bring out the good in people as well as the bad.

Mostly, though, my memories are of the “waterland” not of the city. The mission in Barisal included two boarding schools for boys and girls respectively, but my father was also responsible for the supervision of sixty churches in the rice-growing district around, covering perhaps thirty miles from north to south. There were only two roads that could take vehicles (with two rivers to be crossed by ferry), but some paths along the tops of canal banks could take cycles, or even rickshaws, and in the dry season it was also possible to cycle across the hard-baked fields. From late June through August boats could travel cross-country through these fields, the tops of the rice plants gently parting to let them through. The rice grew up through water that could be as deep as six or even twelve feet if level rose slowly, though unable to keep up with a sudden flood. In December, when the water began to subside, the tops of the plants would flop over and then boats had to keep to canals and rivers while the harvest was reaped. All along the banks there would be fishermen “casting their nets” to lie flat on the water and sink slowly before being drawn in again with a catch.

Through this land my father would sometimes take me, sitting on a cushion on the carrier of his bicycle. When we had to cross over a bridge (sometimes only a foot or so wide) he would carry his bike over while I literally “walked the plank” behind him. On one occasion he found he had a flat tyre so I rode on the saddle while he pushed the bike home - some eleven miles as I have since been told, and I sang all the way to “encourage” him.. Other times we might go in a boat, either the mission “houseboat” or in one of the smaller ones with a curved straw roof over the central part. The not wholly reliable timing of the monsoon could make a difference. I remember one occasion when the whole family had paid a visit somewhere for a few days in the houseboat only to find that the water level meant we had to abandon it and walk part of the way home. We set out along the canal path in the dark when suddenly the rain began to fall with such violence that we had to seek shelter. The sound of heavy rain on a corrugated iron roof has to be heard to be believed.

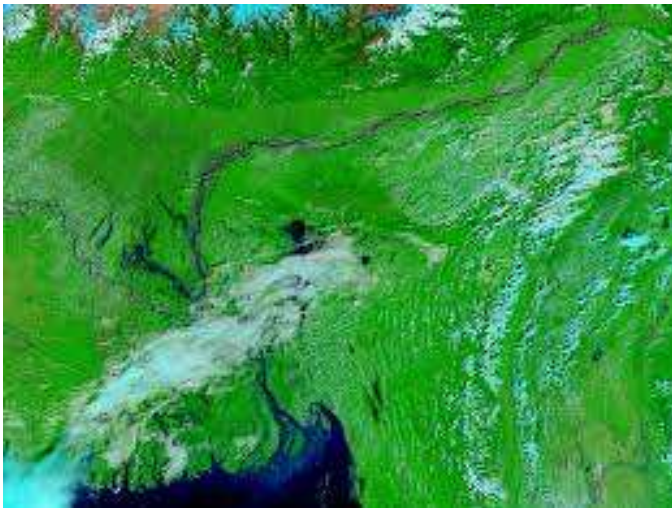
Such roofs were not common. Most of the village people lived in mud houses with straw thatched roofs. These would be on artificial, hard-baked mud islands built to be above the water level normally expected during the “rainy season”, though they could be on stilts. The islands were small and some people also had floating vegetable plots, made of layers of straw and earth and anchored by a long bamboo pole. Occasionally there might be a larger, extra thick one, attached to an island to support the cows in their shed. When I accompanied my father to these island villages I apparently caused much interest particularly among the children. My father would return from whatever he had been doing to find me seated in the centre of wide-eyed group, the object of solemn speculation. On one occasion he found three women carefully examining my long hair for the nits which, to their surprise, I had not got.

My final notable memory is of the time when a man from one of the villages arrived in Barisal with his whole family and announced to my father, “There is no food in my village, and no work. What can you do for us?” The truthful answer would have been “not much”. It appeared that many, though not all, of the local rice fields had lost their crop to a parasite that neither my father nor the farmers knew anything about. This was in 1948 or ’49, in the days before Oxfam and Christian Aid. With the help of friends in England my father collected enough money to provide a meal twice a week for the children - the adults would have to fend for themselves. So seventy children were sat down in a long row in front of the house, each with large leaf as a plate (no need for cutlery as they rolled their food into little balls with their fingers before popping it into their

mouths) Each “plate” received a dollop of mixed rice and lentils and a crowning spoonful of peanut butter, obtained from Calcutta where there were still large tins of it left behind by the departing American forces and very cheap to buy. I and my elder sister had the privilege of going along the line to help serve, and this continued twice a week until things apparently looked up in their villages.

Many people heard what was going on. One day the girls in the Boarding School decided to go without their midday meal so as to feed the children. Another time a Christian employed by the Steamer company paid for a day’s meal. One longer result was that my father made enquiries to find out what had caused the blight and subsequently wrote to the BMS to ask whether they had ever had an agricultural missionary who might be able to answer the kind of need that had not been covered in his theological training. Missions had run schools and hospitals for many years but this was a new idea. I left Bangladesh soon after this and have never returned, but though there have been many changes - for both good and not so good - since then, I do not believe that the people or the villages have changed much. Climate and increasingly serious floods are another matter.

*Janet Bottoms*



Flooding in Bangladesh.

NASA Image courtesy the MODIS Rapid Response System

## MONTHLY CAUSE FOR OCTOBER

### Commitment for Life

*Commitment for Life* is the global justice programme of the United Reformed Church, working in partnership with *Christian Aid* and *Global Justice Now* since 1992.

It supports programmes in four areas, Bangladesh, Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala), Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Zimbabwe.

Downing Place URC have chosen Bangladesh as our new partner country, and through our support of CfL many projects have been set up in Bangladesh, such as the “*Pani Parishads*”, or people’s water committees.

Can you imagine having to walk for hours to find clean drinking water, sometimes 24 hours away? Water supplies that were once fresh are now full of salt water as sea levels rise affecting the low lying regions in Bangladesh. Some wells are contaminated by sewage or dangerous minerals.

The solutions are wide-ranging. They include improved and better sited wells, better filtering systems and improved ways of harvesting and storing rainwater. The *Pani Parishads* are trained and equipped to implement the best solutions for each area.

With the support of *Christian Aid*’s partner organisation, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced studies, the *Pani Parishads* are now providing a forum for communities across Bangladesh to tackle problems such as the quality of education services and land tenure issues. If they come together they can achieve things that they couldn't if they were alone. This spirit will be vital as the country tries to deal with the devastating effects of climate change.

There are many moving stories in the new CfL update magazine - please take a copy along with the CfL envelope. More information and stories are available by visiting [www.urc.org.uk/cfl](http://www.urc.org.uk/cfl)

Please make donations online to the Church’s CAF Bank account, sort code 40-52-40, account number 00029711 using the reference CFL; or make cheques payable to Downing Place URC. CfL envelopes can be put in the collecting plate throughout October.

*Madeline Impey (CfL link person)*

## INTERESTED?

The future is unavoidably shrouded in mystery for all humankind, and the current political situation appears to provide a prime example of “**unknown unknowns**”! Nevertheless, **plans are drawn up**, dates fixed, tickets purchased, deposits paid over in the expectation that whatever is in the diary will come to pass. Here, therefore, is a prospectus for Downing Place members and friends. Might you consider booking the dates, 27-29 November 2020, to spend a church weekend at Launde Abbey, in Leicestershire? (Details of the conference centre/retreat house may be explored at: <https://www.laundeabbey.org.uk/>)

The programme would include worship, talks, discussion in plenary and small group settings, fellowship, fun and challenge – it is particularly appropriate that the weekend is the first in Advent, the **beginning of the church’s liturgical year, and at a point when we expect**, (note the future confidence), that the new building will be about to become our congregational home. The idea of finding a venue away from Cambridge arose within the Local Events & Mission Group, soon to be reorganised as Witness, Evangelism & Service. **Nigel knew of Launde’s hospitality, and the responses of the House** have been very positive to our enquiries. We do, however, need to have a sense of how many bookings we might want to make for an arrival on Friday evening for dinner, through to departure on Sunday after lunch. The journey time is given as around one and a half hours from Cambridge, A14 permitting.

If we book the entire complement of rooms, and occupy all the beds, 66 people can be accommodated. En suite facilities are standard throughout, and a full house would mean that every meeting room would also be at our disposal for break-out sessions etc.

Costs are already fixed for 2020, which will help with budgeting. What follows is advisory, in that the elders propose that those attending contribute what they can afford to a common enterprise – this also allows anyone otherwise prevented from sharing in the weekend to be part of it.

**Launde's tariff for the full weekend is £190.00 (discounts for children up to 15 years old).**

For a one night stay only, the charge is £103.00.

For a day visitor, the charge is either £28.10 (morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea) or £46.10 (dinner added).

A deposit has already been paid, but a further amount based on anticipated numbers will be required in November 2019. Please do consider whether this is something for YOU, and return the next page to Margaret Thompson, or email her by 1 November 2019. Please be assured that this does not commit you in any way at the moment.

Weekend for Downing Place, Cambridge United Reformed  
Church, at Launde Abbey

I/We have read about the weekend of 27-29 November 2020, and am interested in the proposal.

Please add my/our name(s) to the list of those who are interested in attending.

NAME(S)

CONTACT DETAILS (email preferable)

SIGNED



Launde Abbey.

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## BIBLE READINGS AND PRAYER TOPICS OCTOBER 2019

Below are the Bible readings we will be following in worship at Downing Place during October. You are invited to read them before coming to church. The **highlighted passage may be the focus for 'Sharing Together'**.

Overleaf are prayer topics for each day, suggesting church and related matters, and a reminder of regular weekly events that need our prayer support.

On the final page find the names of church members preaching elsewhere this month and a prayer for 'justice and peace'.

October 6th: Habakkuk 1. 1-4; 2. 1-4

Psalm 37. 1-9

2 Timothy 1. 1-14

Luke 17, 5-10

October 13th: 2 Kings 5, 1-3, 7-15c

Psalm 111

2 Timothy 2. 8-15

Luke 17. 11-19

October 20th: Genesis 32. 22-31

Psalm 121

2 Timothy 3. 14 - 4.5

Luke 18.1-8

October 27th: Jeremiah 14.7-10, 19-22

Psalm 84. 1-7

2 Timothy 4. 6-8, 16-18

Luke 18. 9-14



## ARROW PRAYERS FOR OCTOBER 2019

1. Pray for new students coming up to Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin this month. May they settle in and find new friends and experiences.
2. Pray for Eddies and for all our former Café Workers that they may find new work and new friends as they settle into new communities.
3. Pray for those you know who are unwell – for doctors and nurses under great stress – and for the Chaplains at local hospitals.
4. Pray for the staff at Arthur Rank House – and for those who are able to spend their last days in a supportive and comforting place.
5. Pray for Westminster College and the study day for Lay Preachers where they will discuss ways of preparing worship for Advent.
6. Pray for our two Ministers – John and Nigel – and especially for their work with the wider URC family. Thank God for their ministry!
7. **Pray for the Officers Meeting today. May they know God's presence with them, as they consider building the life of this congregation.**
8. Pray for our caretaker and cleaners and all who help to keep our premises fresh and clean. Pray too for their families.
9. Pray for Ann and Elaine in the Office, as they keep track of the lettings and coordinate with the needs of the church members.
10. Pray for our Ferried Friends and their hosts, and for people who have limited opportunities to meet others – and those who care for them.
11. Pray for our World Church Weekend and for the Harvest Supper this evening – when Robin Greenwood of Christian Aid, is our main speaker. May new friends feel especially welcome tonight.
12. Pray for the people of Bangladesh, a low-lying country prone to floods. Pray for all those farming and fishing on the many islands.
13. Harvest Festival. Pray for people in all countries suffering from the effects of climate change. May we all be prepared to change our lifestyles to take climate change seriously into account!
14. Pray for the Elders Meeting tonight, that they may be encouraged by the progress that is being made with the redevelopment.
15. **This week is 'End Hunger' week** – pray for those in our community who do not have enough to eat, particularly for the Food Bank and families who struggle to feed their children.
16. **In 'End Hunger' Week pray for Christian Aid and all concerned with helping communities develop new practical farming methods.**

17. **Pray for the Gibson's Lunch today** – for those who cook and those who share the fellowship together. Thank God for your meals today!
18. Pray for NightLite in Hobbs Pavilion on Parkers Piece, and for those young people who find comfort and friendship in their ministry.
19. Pray for people returning to DPURC today, to remember the days of YPSEG in Emmanuel, a youth group which lasted for more than 40 years! May they find inspiration from the stories of their lives!
20. Pray for Mark and Ian and the music they bring together to our life and worship – and all who take part in the choir and the orchestra.
21. Pray for the Book Group meeting this evening and thank God for the gift of sight and the provision of free libraries for all.
22. Pray for the people who live on our streets, that they may find friendship and structure to their lives once again.
23. **Pray for Jimmy's and WinterComfort and all who seek to help the homeless and rootless people in Cambridge with appropriate support.**
24. Pray for the Cambridge Knit One, Give One – and for all the organisations they help, at home and overseas, by the items and garments they knit!
25. **Pray for the first session in our 'Talking About God' series starting this evening**, for John Bradbury as he leads it and for those who will be there.
26. Pray for those who will be out on the town tonight and for Cambridge Street Pastors who seek to help and support those in distress
27. Pray for the Open Table Service this evening – and thank God for the friends who welcome all to share communion together.
28. Pray for your own family and friends, and lift up to God those who are facing a challenging time, and trust in the loving mercy of God.
29. Pray for our friends in residential care, and for the staff and visitors who provide regular and caring support for them.
30. Pray for families who are struggling to feed and clothe their children, and for the organisations who support them.
31. Pray for the children in our church community and for their parents meeting tonight with Nigel and Rosemary to share ideas together.

### A Prayer for October

Father God, We thank you for the fresh Autumn days,  
The beauty of the changing leaves, the frosty nights,  
And the challenge of each new day. Amen

## Church Members Leading Worship in October 2019

October 6<sup>th</sup>: Chris Baker - Bassingbourn  
Liz Caswell - 9.30 Lode 11.00 Bottisham  
Paul Whittle - Whittlesford  
Janet Tollington – Melbourn  
Nigel Uden – morning: Caterham; afternoon: Upper Clapton

October 13<sup>th</sup>: Chris Baker - Burwell (Harvest Service)  
Augur Pearce – Melbourn  
David Tatem – Melbourn  
Janet Tollington – Stetchworth and Cheveley  
Nigel Uden – Dulwich Grove  
Paul Whittle - Wattisfield

October 20<sup>th</sup>: Janet Bottoms – Fulbourn  
Penny Flynn – Castle Camps  
Janet Tollington – Buntingford  
Nigel Uden - Gillingham

October 27<sup>th</sup>: Janet Bottoms – Melbourn  
Liz Caswell – Castle Camps  
David Cornick – Buntingford  
Nigel Uden – Fulbourn; morning and evening

### A Prayer for Justice and Peace

God of justice and peace,  
We commit ourselves to the gospel of Jesus Christ:  
Spelling hope to the downtrodden,  
Justice to the oppressed, and new life for all.  
A gospel not just about words and creeds,  
But about loving deeds  
Measured by the commitment of Christ.  
God of justice and peace,  
We commit ourselves afresh to the gospel of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

*From 'Seasons and Celebrations' compiled by Donald Hilton.*



## WORLD CHURCH WEEKEND

Bangladeshi evening, Friday 11th October, 7 p.m. at Emmanuel

A Bangladeshi evening with Bangladeshi food, a talk about **Christian Aid's work in Bangladesh**, and a chance to see the Bangladesh exhibition.

Please sign up by Sunday 6th October on the list in the Garden Room to say you will be there.



### Harvest Thanksgiving Service

led by members of the World Church and Public Issues group,

**Sunday 13th October, 11 a.m. at Emmanuel**

Harvest gifts of tinned or packaged food welcome

**Gifts to go to Jimmy's homeless shelter**

# OCTOBER DIARY

Tuesday 1st	2.30pm	Tuesday Fellowship Beetle Drive	CHR
Wednesday 2nd	1.00pm	Free Lunchtime Concert Jessica Lawrence-Hares (mezzo-soprano)	Emmanuel
	7.00pm	Centre for Cambridge Churches Forum Annual General Meeting and Bring and Share Supper	Emmanuel
Thursday 3rd	1.30pm	Knit One, Give One	Emmanuel
Sunday 6th	10.00am	Choir Practice	Emmanuel
	11.00am	Morning Worship with Communion led by Revd Dr John Bradbury  <b>FOODBANK COLLECTION</b>	Emmanuel
Monday 7th	12.30pm	Prayers for the life and witness of our church, followed by a simple lunch	At the home of David & Penny Flynn
	4.00pm	<b>Officers' Meeting</b>	Emmanuel
Tuesday 8th	2.30pm	Tuesday Fellowship Shoebox Planning	CHR
	7.30pm	Finance and Management Committee meeting	At the home of Stephen Thornton
Wednesday 9th	1.00pm	Free Lunchtime Concert: Cambridge Chamber Ensemble	Emmanuel

Thursday 10th	10.30am	Ferried Friends	At the home of David & Penny Flynn
	11.00am	Midweek Worship led by Annemarie Pachel	Emmanuel
	1.30pm	Knit One, Give One	Emmanuel
	7.30pm	Singing Housegroup	At the home of David & Penny Flynn
Friday 11th	7.00pm	Harvest Supper	Emmanuel
Sunday 13th	10.00am	Choir Practice	Emmanuel
	11.00am	Morning Worship led by the World Church and Mission Group	Emmanuel
	7.00pm	Open Table Bring and Share Supper	Little St Mary's Parish Centre
Monday 14th	7.30pm	<b>Elders' Meeting</b>	Emmanuel
Tuesday 15th	2.30pm	Tuesday Fellowship Bible Study with Michael Beckett	CHR
	2.30pm	The Word Together Bible Study Group	Fulbourn URC
Wednesday 16th	1.00pm	Free Lunchtime Concert: Zoe Perkins (trumpet)	Emmanuel
Thursday 17th	12.30pm	Gibson Lunch	Emmanuel
	1.30pm	Knit One, Give One	Emmanuel

Saturday 19th	3.00pm onwards	YPSEG Reunion	Emmanuel
Sunday 20th	10.00am	Choir Practice	Emmanuel
	11.00am	Morning Worship led by Mike Wilson	
Monday 21st	7.30pm	Book Group: ‘Half Truths and Semi-Miracles’ by Anne Tyler	At the home of Evelyn Bailey
Tuesday 22nd	2.30pm	CHR Tuesday Fellowship Bring and Buy Sale	CHR
	7.00pm	Buildings Group Meeting	Emmanuel
Wednesday 23rd	1.00pm	Free Lunchtime Concert Junior Prime Brass  DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING ARTICLES FOR NOVEMBER PLACE MATTERS	Emmanuel
Thursday 24th	11.00am	Midweek Worship with Communion led by Revd Nigel Uden	Emmanuel
	1.30pm	Knit One, Give One	Emmanuel
	7.30pm	Singing Housegroup	At the home of David & Penny Flynn
Friday 25th	7.30pm	‘Talking About God’ Explorations in Faith led by Revd Dr John Bradbury Session 1: God the Creator	Emmanuel



Saturday 26th	7.30pm	'JOYCE' - A Celebration Performed by Jane Bower	At the home of Stephen and Lorraine Thornton
	7.30pm	Cottenham Brass Band Concert	Fulbourn URC
Sunday 27th	10.00am	Choir Practice	Emmanuel
	11.00am	Morning Worship led by Revd Dr Robert Mackley	Emmanuel
	6.00pm	Evening Worship led by Revd Nigel Uden	Fulbourn URC
	7.30pm	Open Table Service for LGBT+ folk and their allies. Refreshments from 7pm	Emmanuel
Tuesday 29th	2.30pm	Tuesday Fellowship <b>Members' Own</b>	CHR
Wednesday 30th	1.00pm	Free Lunchtime Concert Katy Edgcombe (mezzo-soprano) and friends	Emmanuel
Thursday 31st	1.30pm	Knit One, Give One	Emmanuel
	8.00pm	Meeting for Parents of Downing Place Children	At the home of Rosemary Johnston



# A GIFT AT CHRISTMAS



Cambridge Women's Aid provides a safe refuge for women and children escaping domestic abuse. Usually they arrive with few or no belongings, so a suggestion was made to the Local Mission and Events group last year that some members of Downing Place might like to send gifts of toys for the children at Christmas.

On following up the idea we discovered that leaving it until very near Christmas was to leave it too late, so this year we are suggesting that anyone who would like to give a toy, or perhaps some small personal gift for a mum, could bring it along to the church early in November, to be passed on in good time. We are therefore going to make a box to put gifts in available in the church on the first two Sundays of November.

Please remember that for health reasons any toys should be new, not second-hand. Gifts for mums might be attractive cosmetics, toiletries, bubble baths etc. or chocolates or other such small items to treat themselves a little at a **difficult time**. Suggestions may also be found on the Women's Aid website: <http://cambridgewa.org.uk/howyoucanhelpus.php>.

*The Local Mission and Events Group*





**I'm sure you'll have heard a lot about** palm oil on the news recently, but what is palm oil? Are palm oil products bad? And is it possible to buy sustainable palm oil products instead?

At 66 million tons annually, palm oil is the most commonly produced vegetable oil and can be found in almost half of our everyday purchases. **It's hidden away in** shampoo, toothpaste, lipstick, and candles as well as everyday foods such as bread, chocolate and instant noodles.

Much of the palm oil we consume every day **isn't sustainable**. Big brands understand that people are trying to avoid

palm oil, so it's often hidden in lists of ingredients under different names such as 'vegetable oil', or 'vegetable fat'. Oil palm plantations are developed in low-lying, wet, tropical areas – where rainforests and peatland grow and endangered species such as orang-utans and tigers live. Clearing for oil palm plantations is devastating for wildlife, habitats, people and climate change.

**The good news is we don't have to avoid all products with palm oil.** Some companies source *sustainable* palm oil, made with respect for the environment and local communities.

There are areas in the world where palm trees are native, or where they're farmed as part of mixed cropping. These palm forests provide a home for local wildlife, and can continue to provide a major part of the economy for local people, lifting them out of poverty.

In 2013, Traidcraft joined with the Serendipalm co-operative in Ghana and Natural Habitats in Ecuador to produce Fair-trade, organic palm oil in a way that supports smallholder growers and allows the palm plants to grow naturally. We call this new oil FairPalm, and use it for our eco-friendly cleaning products and our delicious fair trade biscuits.

So, are all palm oil products bad? They definitely can be. But by buying *sustainable* palm oil products like those from Ghana and Ecuador, you can help the environment and people in local communities to flourish.

Stephen & Lorraine Thornton, with thanks to *Traidcraft* for supplying the information in this article.

# NOTICES

## Prayer Handbooks and Diaries 2020

I am taking orders for 'Prayers from the Heart' (£4.99 - cheaper than 2019!) - the Prayer Handbook for 2020.

You may also order your URC diaries through me - price currently not known.

*Ted Dennison*

## **Another Performance of 'JOYCE, a Celebration' by Jane Bower**

Following Jane Bower's successful performance of '*Joyce, A Celebration*' earlier this year, she has agreed to give another performance of this production that celebrates the life, humour, monologues and songs of the much-loved writer, actress, singer and comedienne, Joyce Grenfell. This will be at the home of Stephen & Lorraine Thornton on the evening of Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October starting at 7.30pm.

The number of seats they can accommodate is strictly limited, so if you missed the first performance, or indeed are interested in seeing it again please let Stephen know as soon as possible by email. Tickets cost £15 in aid of the church redevelopment. Refreshments will be available.

## URC Ministry and Mission Contribution

We have received thanks from Revd Paul Whittle for our contribution of £137,568 to the URC Ministry and Mission in 2018. This money helps the spread the Good News of God's love through funding ministers' stipends and training as well as supporting mission initiatives. The 'thank you' letter is on the noticeboard in the Church Hall.

## Paying by cheque

You may notice that in a couple of places in this Magazine (specifically Reform subscriptions and Commitment for Life) we are encouraging those who are able, to pay directly into the Church's bank account rather than submitting cheques. The reason for this is that we can only pay in 50 cheques per month, after which a charge applies to every cheque banked - so if we pay in 51 cheques, we are charged 51 times! To avoid losing so much of your precious donations in bank charges, it is very helpful if those who can do so, use other methods of payment at peak times when a lot of subscriptions or contributions are paid.

## REFORM *the* magazine of the URC: Subscribe for 2020

If you value the freshest most challenging and most enriching Christian magazine there is, you are invited to consider a subscription to REFORM *the* magazine of the United Reformed Church, it contains insight into current thinking about the church and also the latest information of the activities of our own Ministers!

Please consider a subscription to a year's supply (10 issues) for a Print copy distributed through Downing Place URC for £29.50 or if you prefer a Digital copy available online for £18

If you would like to have your own copy in 2020 please contact Andy McKenzie ASAP.

If you have access to online banking, payment should be made directly to Downing Place URC's CAF Bank account. If this is not possible, payment can be made by cheque made payable to Downing Place URC before Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November. *Thank you*

*Andy McKenzie*



## TALKING ABOUT GOD: EXPLORATIONS IN FAITH

A 6-week exploration of the Christian faith, reflecting on some of the big themes of faith and life. Each week we will take a major theme in Christian life and thought, and explore it through some key pieces of scripture.

Friday 25 <sup>th</sup> October:	God the creator
Friday 1 <sup>st</sup> November:	Who is Jesus Christ?
Friday 8 <sup>th</sup> November:	The Spirit blows where it wills...
Friday 15 <sup>th</sup> November:	Sharing stories of the faith.
Friday 22 <sup>nd</sup> November:	Being Human
Friday 29 <sup>th</sup> November:	Human flourishing - Christian ethics in everyday life

All sessions will take place at Emmanuel URC, Trumpington Street, from 7:30pm.

## SIMONE MAGHENZANI



*Simone is the Convenor of the Downing Place World Church and Public Issues group, formerly the World Church and World Mission group, and an Elder of Downing Place. Here he talks about himself to Place Matters.*

*PM:* You were born in Italy?

*Simone:* Yes, I come from Turin, in the North West of Italy. I had a view of the Alps from my bedroom window. My father's family came from Turin, my mother's family had moved to Turin from the country, near Asti, and we still have my grandparents' house in the hills.

I have one sister, Sara, who in fact is from Brazil – my parents adopted her as a two weeks old baby. I was four when we all flew out to Brazil for two months to adopt her, but I remember the experience very clearly. The contrast between our comfortable home and the poverty of the favelas made a huge impression on me. Sara grew up in our family, and of course is totally Italian. She married recently, and she and her husband live right next door to our parents, and attend our Church.

PM: You went to school in Turin?

Simone: My secondary school was in Chieri, a market town in the Turin district, about ten miles outside Turin. After three years at middle school, at age 14 I opted to go to the liceo classico, which meant I studied a broad range of subjects, but also Latin and Greek, history, philosophy and languages, French, and English, and some science. Italian and maths were compulsory of course, so was PE, which I hated! That study course lasted five years, and at age 19 I went on to University in Turin – not only my local University, but also one of the leading Universities in the country. It was a big change from my school in a market town. I read history, which had always been my main interest since I visited Pompeii as a child. I was also interested in theology, but in Italy theology is not taught in the state Universities.

PM: You graduated in 2008 – what next?

Simone: 2008 was not the best time to graduate, right in the middle of the financial crisis. With a history degree I could really only hope to go into teaching or something like museum work, but I knew I wanted to research and aim for a University career. So I enrolled on a two year Masters, where my dissertation was on the translation of the Bible into Italian in the seventeenth century

Next came a Ph.D., which I started on January 1st, 2011 (1.1.11!), but only after I had to go through a tough three day competition with written and oral exams to get a place and a scholarship. My Ph.D was in Reformation history 1560-1650 , Protestant propaganda in Italy, basically what remained of the Reformation after the Council of Trent.

There were few prospects for an academic career in Italy as the University sector was still shrinking and demoralised, so I had to look around for other openings. I travelled a lot for research, mainly to Switzerland and the UK, I had a term in Oxford, and I had a Visiting Scholarship at Sidney Sussex here in Cambridge. I was welcomed as a member of the SCR, although I was still a Ph.D. student, and in the college I found a sense of community and mutual support which I valued and which the large Italian Universities cannot offer. I finished the Ph.D. in 2014, had my viva in Turin and immediately flew back to the UK to start postdoctoral research at Robinson College. The next year I was appointed Lecturer in history and Fellow of Girton, where I have been for four years now. **I'm an early modern Church historian, and I'm just finishing a book on British Protestant missions abroad after the Reformation. I'm also the Praelector, the official who presents candidates for matriculation and graduation (often in**

Latin!), and the College Wine Steward. I'm on the committee which supports the Chapel in Girton, where I enjoy the music and the affirmation of the Christian tradition.

PM: I know you recently married.

Simone: Yes, Joan and I met in Cambridge in 2013. That was another incentive to come back to Cambridge! Joan is also a historian, she was at St. John's, and is now a lecturer in British and Irish history at King's College London. Joan is a proud Dubliner, so we do a lot of travelling to see our families. We were married a year ago in St. John's College Chapel, and now live in St. Neots. Joan commutes by train, I drive to Girton, where I can park!

PM: Can you tell us about the Waldensian Church?

In Italy I belong to the Waldensian Church, which is now one of the main Protestant Churches in the country. It has a long history and was founded in the twelfth century as a reform movement within the Catholic Church, becoming with the Reformation the Italian Presbyterian Church. It was soon condemned and suffered terrible persecutions through the centuries, until its members were granted full civil rights in 1848.

Both my parents were heavily involved in the Church, my father had been an Elder for as long as I can remember and my mother was the Church Treasurer. I too was very committed, I worked with young people in youth groups and summer schools - my life was school and Church. I helped to lead services and even preached. I considered the Ministry at one point, but finally opted for teaching and research.

PM: What brought you to St. Columba's, and now Downing Place?

Simone: I looked around at other Churches in Cambridge, but a friend who was studying at Westminster was worshipping at St. Columba's and brought me along. I liked what I found – the style of worship and preaching, the music,





and the central place of Scripture, the structured pastoral care. I felt welcome, and encouraged to offer my talents, without there being any overt pressure. Now I think the union with Emmanuel to become Downing Place offers great potential for new initiatives – we already have Open Table – and although there is still a long way to go we are well on the road.

PM: Tell us about your work with the World Church and Public Issues group.

Simone: I was asked to become Convenor of the World Church and World **Mission group at St. Columba's, perhaps because I had experience of other Churches abroad.** The Waldensian Church has a special affinity with refugees because of its own history of persecution and being driven out from its home to exile in the mountain valleys of Piedmont. It is closely involved with Mediterranean Hope, the refugee charity supported by the Italian Protestant Churches, which Downing Place also supports. The Church has been using its redundant properties to house and care for refugees. Many people will remember that In Spring 2018 I went with Nigel to visit refugee projects in Sicily associated with the Waldensian Church.

PM: Do you have time for any other interests?

We travel a lot of course for work and to see our families. I play the **piano and organ, but we don't have a piano at home, so I will occasionally play in college, but only when there is no one else around to hear!**



## ANNEMARIE PACHEL

Hi there!

Maybe you have seen me on a meeting or on a Sunday service before, but wondering who I am and what I am doing here. Then keep on reading! Your curiosity will be satisfied.



First things first: My name is Annemarie Pachel.

In October 28 years ago I was born and raised in the south western part of Germany, precisely in the Palatinate. My favourite colours are all shades of green and no biscuit is safe from me. And, I started training for ministry at the Protestant Church of Palatinate nearly two years ago.

Now I am here for 4 months doing a placement at Downing Place as a part of my training. During my time here I am interested in everyday church life, **getting to know to your way of being a living part of Christ's body.**

It has been a long journey till I could come here for a placement. I started studying theology in autumn 2011 at the University of Greifswald, an old Hanseatic city at the Baltic Sea.

In Germany you are expected to study at least 4 years at a university before you are allowed to sign up for the first theological exam. At the very beginning you have to learn Latin, Old Greek and Old Hebrew. The idea behind is that you can read the Bible in its original language and translate every Sunday the biblical reading the sermon is based on. But to be honest, I hardly know anybody who does this.

Until some years ago it was up to you to design your study schedule. During the whole period of studying you were expected to attend at least one seminar and lecture in Old and New Testament, Church History, Systematic Theology and Practical Theology and write at least one paper in each subject. So this means you were free to choose your own focus and the seminars you would like to attend. My focus was and is still Church History, especially the Reformation Period.

After almost 3 years at the University of Greifswald I spent one term abroad at the University of Tartu, Estonia, and continued in summer 2015 with my studies at the University of Mainz.

After another 2 years at University I finally graduated. Due to the semi-separation between church and state in Germany, you study at a university, but in order to become a minister the final exam takes place at church. The exam consists of 3 written and 5 oral exams, also a sermon and a thesis have to be handed in.

After that, the practical training for ministry started in September 2017. Time and subjects of practical training for ministry vary slightly between the different regional established churches.

The 2 ½ years of practical training in Church of Palatinate is split into three parts: I spent the first six months as a teacher for religion in an elementary school (3 months) and in a secondary school (3 months). After that I have been in a congregation for 15 months. During this time I learned how to conduct services, baptisms and funerals, got some insights in administration and many more things. And for the last part I am allowed to choose whatever churchly field of work I would like to. So I choose to come here and stay with you here for 4 months.

The times of practical training in school or congregation are every now and then interrupted by block weeks at the preacher seminary, which is located in Landau. Also all sorts of exams take place in this time: written exams as well as a lesson, a service and a sermon are marked. And there will be final oral exams in February 2020.

Of course I have to pass all those exams before I will be granted my own parish. But the exams and their results are not as important as THE interview, which takes place after the oral exams. In half an hour of questioning by a church committee, it will decide whether I will be employed as a minister or not.

So there is still some way lying ahead of me before I will be granted my own parish. But first of all, I will enjoy my time here at Downing Place and I look forward to be in touch with you!

All the best,

Annemarie Pachel

## CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

A time of new beginnings – as we gathered after summer travelling. After the service of dedication and blessing, we had a sunny picnic. Most popular game is 'Hide the Gnome'.



We welcomed Lindsay [second left], who has joined the Team, and Annemarie [first right] here from Germany for this term.

We said 'Thank you' to Zoë and sent her with love and prayers to University.



## PASTORAL NEWS

We note with sadness the deaths of Betty Butler and Joan Denison (formerly of St. Columba's).

We send our congratulations to the Masseys, the Peirces and the Thompsons, all of whom have recently celebrated their Golden Wedding.

We also congratulate Zoe Norgett on her A-level results which gained her a place at Leeds to study Engineering. We wish her well for her University career.

## DAILY DEVOTIONS

Daily Devotions, the United Reformed Church's (URC) series of digital daily Bible readings, reflections and prayers, reached its 1000th edition on 23 August.

The devotions are written by more than 100 people from across the denomination.

More than 3,000 subscribers receive the inspirational readings in their inboxes at 6am each day, and hundreds more follow [online](#).

The Rev'd Andy Braunston, Minister of Barrhead, Priesthill, Shawlands and Stewarton URCs in the Synod of Scotland's Southside Cluster, created the project when working for the Metropolitan Congregation in Manchester in 2016. He sent out his own reflections on the weekly lectionary readings to members of the congregation. This then evolved into the Devotions we know today.

He said:

**"I am so pleased that so many people both read the Devotions and have volunteered to write for them.**

**"Many people have commented that the devotions are a way in which the URC expresses a form of unity, each day, normally first thing in the morning, so many of us are reading, reflecting and praying about the same passage."**

A small team of people work with Andy to advise on themes and sometimes suggest writers for a particular series, for example, the Rev'd Dr Janet Tollington's series on Job and the Rev'd Michael Hopkin's series on the Lord's Prayer.

One of the writers, the Rev'd Fiona Thomas, URC Secretary for Education and Learning, shares her experience in writing a devotion:

**"I enjoy the discipline of staying within the word limit and writing a short prayer, always aware that the people who offer these on the day before or after may be coming at the text from a completely different direction from myself. That diversity is refreshing, and as a subscriber to the devotions I find the divergent interpretations of scripture startling and refreshing, whether I agree with them or not."**

More than 50% of subscribers recently took part in a survey which showed long-term engagement with the devotions, and a substantial number of new readers.

Almost 70% of readers were involved in a local URC and another 12% in an ecumenical church that included the URC. Roman Catholics, members of the Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of England also read the devotions.

Around 45% of respondents felt the devotions were relevant almost every day to their own faith journeys and another 53% said they were often relevant.

“Given the diverse nature of our writers and our readers this is quite an achievement; especially as everyone involved are volunteers,” continued Andy.

“One of the most moving aspects of the feedback is that some people use the devotions as they can no longer get to church. This is sometimes due to illness or the fact their church has closed. In this small way the devotions allow people to keep contact with the spiritual tradition which has nurtured them for years.”

The Daily Devotions are a great tool for local churches for use in small groups, Elders' meetings or even as sermon starters. They are also available in an A5 book for people to print off for those in their congregations who don't have access to the internet.



Image from Southern Synod website  
[www.southern-synod-urc.org.uk/urc-daily-devotions](http://www.southern-synod-urc.org.uk/urc-daily-devotions)

# THE GROUP THERAPY CENTRE

The Group Therapy Centre Cambridge is this year celebrating 50 years of providing group therapy to residents of Cambridgeshire. The Group Therapy Centre was originally founded in 1969 by Reverend Ronald Speirs as the **St Columba Centre, as part of the St Columba's Church, along with Revd Bill Lintott and Dr Ross Mitchell** who was a consultant psychiatrist at Fulbourn Hospital.

The Centre is a not-for-profit organisation and is unique in being commissioned by the NHS to provide no-cost and low-cost short term CBT groups and longer term analytic psychotherapy groups for a wide range and complexity of emotional and psychological difficulties. We currently run 23 weekly therapy groups in Cambridgeshire - in Cambridge, Huntingdon and Ely. **This partial NHS funding doesn't, however, cover the cost for patients who require additional therapy and whose difficulties mean they will benefit from much longer term group therapy. We are committed to providing this additional and longer-term treatment to those who need it most. We also believe that the individuals' financial situation should not be the deciding factor in them receiving appropriate psychological therapy.**

At our fundraising event in November, Dr Linde Wotton will be giving a talk on the musicality of belonging in groups <http://iiga.weebly.com/wotton-linde.html> ; This will be followed by a Concert by internationally renowned virtuoso pianists Claire and Antoinette Cann <http://www.canntwins.co.uk/>

We are also planning a silent auction at the event.

You could support the Group Therapy Centre by:

1. Purchasing tickets to our fundraising event on 15 November 2019 at Mumford Theatre (Anglia Ruskin University) see flier
2. Making a donation of an item / experience that could be auctioned or raffled. Making a donation to the Centre <https://grouptherapycambridge.org.uk/giving/>
1. All of the above!

We would be very grateful of your support in any way you can.





# *When Words Fail, Music Speaks*

The Group Therapy Centre Cambridge

**50th Anniversary Celebrations and Fundraising Appeal**

Friday 15th November 7.30pm

Mumford Theatre ARU Cambridge

Anglia Ruskin University, East Road, Cambridge

Tickets £15 (students and concessions £10) Box Office 01223-352932

*"...played with fascinating perfection"*

Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung

Music from Swan Lake, Dolly Suite

&

Polovtsian Dances

on piano duet

Silent Auction  
Raffle  
Drinks Reception



# The Cann Twins

In Concert

**Dr Linde Wotton— *The Improvisation of Belonging***

**A short talk on the musicality of belonging in human groups**

Dr Linde Wotton is a Psychiatrist and Group Analyst, Chair of the International Course Committee at the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) and Chair of the Scientific Committee of The Group Analytic Society International (GASI).

The Group Therapy Centre is a not for profit organisation (registered charity number 1136632)

## MEDITATION GROUP AT EMMANUEL CHURCH 2019

The meditation group meets fortnightly, and, since the temporary closure of Downing Place church, we now meet in Emmanuel Church, Trumpington Street. We are very grateful to Downing Place URC for continuing to accommodate us during this period.

We are a small, informal group, currently with 6 to 8 members which, although Christian-based does not follow a particular meditative tradition. The form of the meeting has developed over time, and we draw on different traditions for our readings using biblical, and other spiritual writings, often including poetry. Each meeting includes a short reading, then 20 minutes or so of silent meditation, followed by the opportunity for spoken reflection and prayers, and in total lasts for about 45 minutes.

The group meets on alternate Fridays at 5.30 pm to about 6.15 pm. in Emmanuel URC Church. Dates for this autumn are:

11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October;  
8<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November  
6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December.

The group is open to anyone, whatever your faith or tradition, and we welcome newcomers, and visitors. Please just turn up, if you would like to do so.

Or, for further information, contact Jenny or Robin Turner.

# Meditation Group

## Meets here

**Emmanuel URC**

**on alternate Fridays 5.30 pm.**

Meditation brings calm and stillness in our busy lives, and can guide us [on our spiritual journey whether towards the Divine, or to deeper understanding.](#)

Each meeting includes a reading, 20 minutes of silence and a period for reflection and prayers.

The meetings last about 45 minutes.

You are welcome to join us whether or not you have a faith and whatever your tradition.

MAGAZINE EDITOR: Sheila Porrer

ITEMS FOR MAGAZINE:

Please send items to both Sheila Porrer and Ann Auger  
([ann@downingplaceurc.org](mailto:ann@downingplaceurc.org))

ITEMS FOR MONTHLY

PRAYER DIARY: Maureen Kendall

WEB EDITOR: Alison Binney

Please send all items to be included in the October edition to both Sheila and Ann by the cut off date of Wednesday 16 October 2019.

Any items received after the deadline will not be included.

The November edition will be available in church from Sunday 27 October 2019.