



**DOWNING PLACE
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
CAMBRIDGE**

PLACE MATTERS



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Cover photograph by Jess Uden

FROM THE MINISTER

Looking back, I realise that Easter has always been big in my life.

Filling my childhood home, quite apart from the chocolate eggs and simnel cake, there were copious flowers. For years, my mother oversaw the decoration of Christ Church, Brockham Green, on Holy Saturday, and over the previous week buckets of blooms gradually filled the conservatory and garage, and oasis blocks were being soaked. Anxiety grew as we watched to see if the trumpets of the Easter lilies would open at the right moment: Good Friday was too early, Easter Monday, too late. After all, you don't get much of a fanfare from a muted trumpet.

I have always found the intense schedule of services for the eight days starting on Palm Sunday to be an equally intense spiritual pilgrimage – nor will I ever forget the year when I also had five funerals in Holy Week. The emotional transition from the cross to the empty tomb has been a challenge that I know I haven't always quite achieved. It's partly the passion of what is being commemorated, but probably sheer fatigue, too. It's not for nothing that church people so often need a few rest days after Easter!

And yet, for the two years that I have not been 'working' at Easter – when on sabbatical in 2000 and in 2023 – my whole liturgical pattern has felt incomplete. You see, ultimately, what I believe about Easter and how I might explain what actually happened, is rather less significant to me than that the Easter ideas and stories and experiences are faithfully narrated as being crucial to the entire life of the Church. I am not over fussed about *how* the tomb was left empty or *how* locked doors were walked through. What does matter is that, being heard of, they point us to the living God; the living God whose Love was and is contested with all the intensity that crucifixion can demonstrate, but was not defeated. And The Church? Well, first and finally it's the Easter community: those who, through marking Holy Week and Easter, constantly rehearse, assimilate, and reflect the reality of the God whom we so often describe as living and loving. So it is that for me, missing out Easter from the jigsaw of the church's year is to miss the whole point.



'Easter Lilies' by Sarah E. Bender de Wolfe (1852–1935), Public Domain, via Wikimedia

I am also ever so aware that my Easter faith has developed, and its emphases have been very varied since I first became a chorister sixty years ago. That is as it should be. Theology is not a dead process about a dead God there and then, but the living God's lively and life-giving engagement with our lived reality, here and now. I recall a Radio 4 sermon many years ago on Trinity Sunday. The preacher began, 'This Trinity Sunday I do not believe what I believed last Trinity Sunday; and I very much hope that next Trinity Sunday I will not believe what I believe this Trinity Sunday.' And so it is with Easter as well. The living God may be immutable, unchanging, but our encounter with that God is forever evolving, just as our own lives are.

All sorts of things stimulate that encounter. Many of my readers will be unsurprised that music helps. The *Et resurrexit* (and he rose again) from Bach's *B minor Mass* is a case in point. The unmuted trumpets and the rapid vocal melismas exquisitely portray the resurrection as a springing from the tomb with an immediacy that almost bathes one in its light. Similarly, there are the hymns we sing at this time: 'love's redeeming work is done', 'love is come again like wheat that springs up green', and so on.



Easter Garden created by Downing Place's Junior Church, Easter 2023.

Photograph by Jess Uden

Of course, the Biblical narratives can be as rewarding on the hundredth reading as they ever have been, such is the capacity for the Scriptures to be reinterpreted for us year by year. The grieving woman in the garden hearing the risen Jesus speak her name, 'Mary!'; the one full of curiosity and questions, who then murmurs the model creed, 'My Lord and my God'; the two walking home, who gradually recognise their companion on the road as first a stranger, then a teacher, then a friend and eventually as their 'risen Lord'. Re-imagine those three episodes, as if you were there and heard your own name, as if your curiosity and questions were not so much answered (how can they be?) as rewarded with faith,

as if Jesus were drawing alongside and walking you home.

We have Holy Communion on Easter Day, even when it is not the first Sunday of the month. That, too, is because it intimates the risen Christ. Although Communion properly recalls something that happened once upon a time on ‘a green hill far away, outside a city wall’, it equally importantly signifies and seals the presence and power of the living God – the One whose love death could not defeat. Easter communion is not an add on; it’s fundamental to Easter worship.

Let’s go one step farther though: could it be that our encounter with the living God today is frequently through those with whom we share communion? Rowan Williams says: ‘When we gather at God’s table the church becomes what it is meant to be.’ He goes on to say, ‘Sometimes after receiving Holy Communion as I look around a congregation, large or small, I have a sensation I can only sum up as *this is it* – this is the moment when people see one another and the world properly: when they are filled with the Holy Spirit and when they are equipped to go and do God’s work’. (*Being Christian* 2014, page 58)



*Holy Communion at Downing Place
Photograph by Stillvision Photography*

Then, quite wondrously, as we leave the worship and go to the world, equipped to be Easter people we also find the risen One in the person who serves us in the supermarket, in the one we serve by speaking with them as they live on the streets. Yes, we find the risen Christ in our neighbour whom we know, but also in the stranger whom we don’t.

And so, Easter is not a commemoration of what was, but a celebration of what is – an experience of God’s unspeakable and undefeatable love, spurring us to serve God’s ultimate mission of life-giving love.

May Easter forever be big in our lives - an unending adventure of discovery and experience.

Nigel Uden

PAT AND PETER PEIRCE – A PROFILE

Pat writes -

I grew up in Yorkshire, with parents (and three older brothers) who had met at a Congregational church in Sutton Coldfield, where my father was a 'son of the Manse'. So I have non-conformity, and particularly Congregationalism in my blood. I came to Homerton College in 1965, specialising in Music and English, and it was natural for me to attend Emmanuel, where Dick Hall was the minister.

Peter arrived in Cambridge in 1966, for ministerial training and study for a BA in Theology. He came along to Emmanuel, and we became friends in 'Prong. Soc.', Sunday WOW (War on Want) lunches and house groups. But it took some months before my mother (visiting one weekend) asked who was the young man winking at me. I'd been told by my friends that he winked at everyone, and I thought perhaps he had a twitch!

We married in August 1969, a few weeks after Peter had begun his ministry in Broxbourne. This was in a brand new church building with a very welcoming congregation, and very happy to try new ideas with their new young minister. Our two children – Jo and Jonathan – were born during our five years there, before we moved to Stowmarket in Suffolk.



'Going Away' from our wedding 1969

We left there after 5½ years because Peter was excited by the opportunity to be Ecumenical Chaplain at Hatfield Poly (now the University of Hertfordshire). We had to live in a top floor flat in the Halls of Residence, with no garden, which wasn't easy with two young children and an ageing labrador. But with no expectations of the chaplain's wife – as there seemed to be in those days of a minister's wife – I was able to train as a counsellor with Relate, and so began my 30 year career as a psychotherapist, which I originally did alongside part-time teaching.

We moved to Henley-on-Thames in 1983 - this was a very happy time for us as a family in a 400-year-old Manse with a very large garden (two old tennis courts on one lawn, and another croquet lawn) beside the Church. Life for all of us was intermingled with the Church and congregation and a constant flow of street-dwellers in our kitchen for tea and sandwiches. After one more year of teaching I decided to work full-time with Relate and the NHS. I also worked with the inter-

denominational counselling service, and ran workshops for ministers and their partners. And I served for some years on the URC National Assessment Board, interviewing candidates for the Ministry, which was really interesting

By 1997 Peter was seeking a new challenge and so we moved to inner-city Birmingham, where Peter became minister at Carrs Lane. I found it very difficult to leave the life I was enjoying with a very varied and satisfying work life, a great tennis club and many good friends (who are still important to us). I threw myself into my work, which included commuting to Relate headquarters in Rugby, and also began telephone counselling which was an interesting add-on, even working with 'Dear Marje' on the Sun for a while!



*Henley newspaper story
welcoming our family 1983*

Our plans to retire from Birmingham were interrupted in 2004, when Peter was called to return to the church in Stowmarket we had left in 1980. It was a very difficult decision and a difficult last 4½ yrs before retirement in 2009, but we both felt we couldn't ignore the strong call to return.

It has been great to come back to Cambridge and Emmanuel (and now Downing Place) in the 15 years since retiring. These years have allowed us time to enjoy some activities that weren't possible during our working years – especially singing in a large choir and some exciting holidays. It is also lovely to be near Jo and her family, and be able to spend time with Jon and his family in Nottingham. The special pleasure of enjoying our six grandchildren (aged from 2 to 23 years old) as they grow is such fun.



*The four of us again, at our Golden Anniversary
celebration*

I have really enjoyed meeting and sharing important times with a wonderful variety of people through my work and Peter's work. To me that feels a privilege and something I really value.

And Peter -

I was born on the 22nd of February 1944. My parents had moved from Ruislip in Middlesex to Wickford in Essex five months previously. I had thought the reason was there wasn't enough room for the fourth child. My eldest brother affirms the real reason was because our neighbours objected to our mother tethering her goats on the grass verge.

In Essex we had a small-holding of ten acres where my mother could keep goats, pigs, chickens, and breed Alsatians. During rationing, if you kept pigs to help the supply of food you were able to keep half a pig for your own use every six months. With a ready supply of chickens and pork we were not short of meat. And we had space to 'live'. It was a good life!

My father was born in Calcutta, baptized in St Paul's Cathedral there and confirmed in St Paul's, London. However my mother's family were staunch Methodists (allegedly one of my ancestors was treasurer of the 'Million Guinea Fund' launched to build Central Hall, Westminster!). But on moving to Wickford, the Methodist Chapel was failing, so the children were dropped off at the 'Congregational'. The minister suggested my parents should 'bring' their children. My father became church secretary for many years, and mother thoroughly involved. So I was brought up in the Congregational Church and delighted in the liberal understanding of faith. I remember that Sundays frequently involved detailed examination of the sermon (we had two wonderful ministers over my 25 years there), but importantly we didn't have to agree. Incidentally, Tony and Janet Bottoms joined our congregation in the early 1960's.

During this time I felt a call to the ministry. It began, oddly, through my non-churchy school friends. Because I was known to have church connections, and could read with a clear voice, I was frequently called upon to read the lesson in assembly, and 'parson', alliterating quite well with 'Pete', that became my nickname. Ultimately I came to the real sense of call, which I could not put aside.

After obtaining an Economics degree at Newcastle I came to Cambridge in 1966. Sadly my father died that summer, the day before we won the World Cup (replays of Bobby Moore lifting the cup always cause a strange feeling). Here I met Pat, and I winked at her (it was not a twitch!). We were allotted the same study



*Newspaper story –
Broxbourne. Local minister
and dog to walk 30 miles for
Christian Aid*

group, in Stephen Banyard's rooms (Stephen was the son of Edmund Banyard, my predecessor at Stowmarket!). Thus began our relationship which includes 54+ years of marriage. I couldn't have done what I have without her love, loyalty and support. Though in good Congregational and non-conformist tradition, she was a vital and important critic. After an early sermon she said quite firmly, that if I used a particular 'theological' word like that again in a sermon she would walk out. On one occasion, in Birmingham, I completely lost my voice and asked her if she would 'read' my sermon, knowing she would do it far better than anyone else. She began by saying, in the most clear terms, that Peter had written this sermon, and she didn't necessarily agree with what it said.

I was ordained at Broxbourne, down the A10, in 1969, in a brand new building just opened, where I was allowed space for youthful inexperience (and had some rough edges knocked off). Thence to Stowmarket, a country market town with a strong independent tradition, another new building following wartime bombing. An opportunity then arose to serve as Ecumenical Chaplain at the Hatfield Polytechnic, an exciting and challenging opportunity to work with Christians, but also people of other faiths and none, who needed support. (One group of 'Christians' accused me of not being a 'proper' Christian because I hadn't told Islamic students they were 'wrong'!!)

We were called to Henley on Thames, to a more traditional building with fixed pews. These were 14 special years, of our children growing up. We set in motion plans for a very significant development of the buildings and site. While we were in Henley we were able to arrange two exchanges with churches in North America. The first was to a Baptist Church (it was a 'Northern' Baptist!!) near Boston. The children were able to enjoy the American speciality of 'Summer Camps'. We enjoyed a delightful time with a lively, musical congregation.

Later we spent six months with a congregation of the United Church of Canada on Vancouver Island. It was an astonishingly beautiful setting with the amazing backdrop of the Comox glacier. The congregation were warm-hearted, lovely people, but we hadn't realised how conservative their theology was! Fortunately the first chapters of Genesis were not the lectionary readings while we were there!

After 14 years it seemed right to move to a new challenge, and thus to central Birmingham, Carrs Lane, a congregation with a great history. Incidentally the buildings were very modern, opened in 1970. Working in a multi-cultural city was a very significant experience, in a church which was committed to serving. Jubilee 2000 was an astonishing experience.

While in Birmingham I took a sabbatical. I arranged to spend two months in a school for children with severe learning difficulties in Nairobi. I was able to make contact with Christian Aid and visit three different projects they are supporting, meeting amazing people who brought a whole new dimension of life for me.

We had expected to remain in Birmingham until retirement, but sadly events in Stowmarket led to the unusual circumstance of returning there. Finally we came full circle back to Cambridge for a happy retirement within a wonderful Church fellowship, AND beautifully refurbished premises! Thank you for having us, Downing Place.



AN INSIGHT INTO OUR RECENT JUNIOR CHURCH SESSIONS WITH THE YOUNGER GROUP

Jess Uden writes On Sunday 18th February we enjoyed a ‘colourful’ morning exploring the story of Noah’s ark and the significance of the rainbow as a reminder of God’s lasting promise that there would never be another flood to destroy the whole world. We opened with singing, retold the story and engaged in several activities according to the age of the children present. These included building with Duplo, using brightly coloured shapes to create patterns, decorating ‘rainbow’ scratch cards with pictures or messages celebrating God’s promise, and making multicoloured fruit kebabs. During coffee time, it was lovely to see the 7 children, ranging from toddlers to upper juniors, sitting in the Hub together enjoying their fruit amongst the wider congregation.

On Sunday 25th February, the lectionary included the story of Abram & Sarai, marking the covenant with God and becoming Abraham & Sarah. We re-enacted the story, did the activity sheets and chatted.



25 February

On Sunday 3rd March, we were reminded of the Ten Commandments and following the rules of Highway Code road signs, for the good of everyone in God's realm. We agreed that it was wiser to wear a cycling helmet than a bobble hat when riding a bike and wiser to eat ice cream with a teaspoon than a fish slice! We watched a YouTube video about things it is good to say. Perhaps adults need to see it too <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5yCOSHeYn4> Then we followed the rules of a recipe to make Papuan Banana Cake. Everyone did a bit and we ended up with a wonderful warm cake to share with all the people during coffee time.



On Sunday 10th March we had a lively session thinking about how we could live our lives in the light of God rather than hide in the darkness. Our gathering activity involved thinking of something kind we had already done that morning. Being Mothering Sunday, all the children were able to offer examples. We then talked about how we could show kindness to others at church too, using the



10 March

example of our tradition of giving Easter plants to some of the older members of our congregation, those who may live alone or perhaps cannot easily get to Sunday services. We marched around the room singing ‘We are marching in the light of God’, first in English and then in Swahili, which was led beautifully by one of the children. Our Bible reading was the story of Nicodemus visiting Jesus in the dark, which we talked about while making colourful, cross shaped gift cards to accompany the potted plants on Easter Sunday. The children then gathered with glow sticks and sang ‘This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine’ to conclude our session.

On St Patrick’s Day baby Anna came to church in her shamrock babygro. We welcomed Marion who came to talk about Sallymay school in Sierra Leone, and we recognised the chairs that used to be in Emmanuel URC in the pictures of the school. We had a globe and enjoyed a collection of things from God’s people all around the world - Taiwan, Brazil, Pacific islands, Australia, Ireland. Nigel also lent us Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans Bibles from South Africa, where Jess was born. He has a beautiful stole embroidered with flowers from South Africa and a letter from Desmond Tutu. We saw Desmond Tutu’s Bible story book for children. We heard how Jeremiah reminded people that God would be their God and they would be God’s people.



17 March

We prayed for Marion and the children in Sierra Leone.

Images and text by Jess Uden

EASTERN SYNOD MEETING AT DOWNING PLACE URC ON 9TH MARCH 2024

Downing Place URC synod representative Penny Flynn writes:

It was a joy to welcome all who attended the Synod meeting to Downing Place. Many had not seen the renewed premises and were suitably impressed. I heard a few of the 'Wows' of which Nigel spoke when we first opened the new building.

Synod began with worship led by our Revds Nigel Uden and Alex Clare-Young, with Owen Saxton accompanying the singing. The Moderator, Revd Lythan Nevard, then welcomed all first-timers, and greeted ministers for whom it would be their last meeting before retirement. One newly accredited lay preacher enthused about the new course she had completed and recommended it to any who felt called to train for that ministry. Certificates were given to those who had completed the Stepwise course. The former Synod Treasurer, Gil Heathcote, whose term had ended, was presented with 'thank you' tokens in his absence, for good and extended service. [Please note a new Honorary Treasurer is sought and a job description is available].



The Downing Place Church Sanctuary

The theme of the agenda was the environment. Synod enjoyed two excellent presentations, from Helen Stephens, A Rocha Church Relations Manager, and from Roo Stewart, URC Programme Officer for Church and Society. Helen's talk, entitled 'Eco Church – what good in a world on fire?' talked us through fire, floods and water-shortages and the URC's Environmental Policy adopted in 2022. 7000 churches of all denominations have signed up to A Rocha's awards scheme, and 3000 have the bronze award. Their challenge is to see 75% of Christian-owned land managed for nature. The Methodist challenge to members is to reduce one's carbon footprint to 1 tonne per person per annum (while the average currently is 4.6 tonnes!!). We were asked to consider these questions: What aspects of caring for God's creation energises you? What might be the next steps for your church? How can we contribute to Synod's Environmental Implementation Plan?

Roo spoke about reaching Net Zero. The Net Zero Task Group was a year old. It served the URC to help take urgent action to reach its aim of net zero emissions by 2030. Apparently the URC is in unexplored territory, with the Anglicans and Methodists ahead in this area. Yet much is being done to look at buildings, homes and travel. We were told to share, in order to encourage one another to take steps towards success.

The Synod Clerk, Revd Dave Coaker, spoke of the Environmental Policy Implementation Plan. The policy was adopted at the previous Synod meeting, when an action plan was requested. This can be viewed on the Synod website at <https://urceastern.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Environmental-policy-Issue-1-Implementation-Plan-approved-0324.pdf>



Downing Place's Courtyard Garden, central to our sustainability and wellbeing

Two churches spoke of their own progress: St Ives Free Church, which has minimal outdoor space but makes good use of large planters outside its walls and works in partnership with the local Methodist church in other ways; and the churches of the Ipswich area, all with different opportunities and who had an Eco-champion. We at Downing Place are fortunate to have our small outdoor spaces, so well-cared for by Katie Milne and others.

The reports from Synod groups reminded us that people are needed for various roles, but that Mission & Discipleship Committee has two new members, one being the secretary; that group always wants to encourage mission and discipleship through grants and advice, and working in partnership to enable projects to happen. Pastoral Committee brought an amendment to the Principles of Mission Partnership to reflect the realities of many groups of churches who might be fairly even in size. (Our own proposed grouping was brought to the March Church Meeting). People were asked to register their feelings about Mission Partnerships so far in a clever electronic system, the results of which created a word picture which would form the basis of future discussion (and can be seen on the Synod website). Open online conversations would take place on various dates, the remaining two being in April, for questions to be asked and explanations sought.

Synod adopted a Lay Presidency at the Sacraments policy, considered further the process for appointing Synod Accredited Local Church Leaders, the process for the potential closure of a church, and matters of property and the Synod Manse scheme. Synod gave thanks for the creation of the Northstowe Church Network, and instructed the Clerk to prepare a General Assembly resolution to receive it (a Local Ecumenical Project, with Church of England and Baptist Union) as a local church of the URC. 'What unites those involved in this new charity is much more than denominational background. It is rooted, growing, and transforming faith based on an encounter with the eternal God who still changes lives today.' Hallelujah!

As ever, meeting people known and new from across the Synod and the years, was a joy. To hear how folk are with whom I trained, by whom I was married, and whose family I knew when living elsewhere, as well as time to converse with friends from this congregation, makes the bringing together of people from across the Synod all the more valuable.

‘TWO INTO ONE WILL GO’

*Introducing a new project reflecting on the coming together
of Emmanuel URC and St Columba’s URC*



As a new member of Downing Place, who joined after the coming together of our two churches, I have been struck by the deep riches of experience held by the congregation in respect of this process of coming together. It is something very special, which it would be wonderful to reflect on and record – for our own benefit and also for the benefit of other churches facing similar decisions and processes, both in the wider URC and ecumenically.

So, with the Minister’s encouragement, I have proposed a reflective project to the Elders’ Meeting, a project of drawing out and writing up the experiences, and above all the *learnings*, both of those most closely involved in the coming together project and also of a wide variety of voices from the congregation – former members of both Emmanuel and St Columba’s and also of those of us who have had the experience of joining Downing Place more recently. I am delighted that the Elders have encouraged me to take this forward.

Two important words of reassurance. First, from my professional background in Practical Theology, including the supervision of students in research projects, I bring skills both in encouraging reflective practice and in doing research in churches appropriately. Second, I am very conscious of the importance of ethical practice, of confidentiality, and of safeguarding, and throughout the project will consult our Safeguarding Officer over relevant issues.

So – to the practicalities! I hope to conduct interviews in May-July 2024. I will be contacting a range of identified people whom I especially would like to talk to, in the hope of arranging times to suit them. As well as that, I would like to offer

five sessions lasting one hour each, to take place on church premises, and am inviting anyone who would like to do so to sign up to join one of these (NB. you only need to come to one, not all five!). The numbers present on each occasion may vary between one and twelve. Those who attend will be invited to offer their reflections on what it has been like to join together – its joys and challenges, prompted by some questions but with a very open agenda. There will be a Participant Information Sheet offered to anyone who is interviewed, explaining all this in more detail, with some added information.

The dates will be published in the weekly notices as soon as exact dates and rooms have been confirmed. Do please contact me if you aren't sure about it and would like to know more before deciding whether to join a group ... or if you have any helpful suggestions and advice for the project.

I propose to write up the results of the interviews between September and November, completing the project by the end of this calendar year. I am looking forward very much indeed to being involved in this, and hope and pray that it will offer something helpful and positive as we move forward in our life together.

Zoë Bennett



The way we were - photographs of the former Emmanuel and St Columba's churches



SHAKESPEARE REVISITED

William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on the 23rd of April, 1564, and died there on the same date in 1616. Last month, the Editor wrote to me “I’d like to include something on Shakespeare in *Place Matters*, and – given the significance of April 23rd – hope that you might agree to contribute something for next month’s issue - between 2 and 4 pages ...” How could I refuse the invitation? I took a deep breath and began.

Shakespeare lived the better part of his life in London, a turbulent, rapidly expanding city, and in the fast developing “theatres” with their constant demand for new plays to replace the old entertainments, “morality plays” and human “types” - a Lover, a Soldier, a King, a Revenger. “All the world’s a stage”, says the cynic Jaques, in *As You Like It*, “and all the men and women merely players”. But Shakespeare knew they were much more than that. When the trope is echoed by the actor who plays Macbeth, we don’t believe it. “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more,” cries Macbeth; merely “a tale / told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing”, but the words contradict themselves. What we see, what we hear, is an exhausted man; brave but flawed; tempted, horrified and haunted by his own actions; and increasingly brutalized as he struggles to hold the dream that lured and deceived him. We fear for him, judge him, pity and are appalled by him, and at his exit recognize the human tragedy in his story.



A 1596 sketch of a rehearsal in progress in a London theatre.

Shakespeare and his characters live in his words. He is present in absence, touching on moral or philosophical issues as his plays explore the complexities of justice or of mercy; love and possession; action and inaction for people who

struggle to navigate a way through their problems. There is Shylock, the money-lender baited by the antisemitic mockery of the complacent young gentlemen of Venice. There is Othello, the Moorish soldier, valued for his courage and generalship by his white employers, but not expected to socialize with them. Only Desdemona, enthralled by the story of his life, sees “Othello’s visage in his mind” and dares to stand up for her right to marry him. While the words Shakespeare gives them show the depth of their love and confidence, the bitter subaltern, “honest Iago”, determines to destroy it. We watch him drop apparently awkward hints, reluctant warnings, and touch sadly on Othello’s trustfulness. “I know our country,” he says. “In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands”. All Othello can claim for himself at the end is that he is “an honourable murderer”, “for nought I did in hate but all in honour” – a “type”, perhaps, but what the audience has seen are two real people confounded by innocence and malice in a real and complex world.

Shakespeare knows how a word like “honour” can be used to inspire or confuse or betray. It beckons the aptly nicknamed “Hotspur” into rebellion and death in *Henry IV, pt I*, but examined mockingly by Falstaff as he reviews the results of that battle. “What is honour? a word. ... What is in that word honour?... air. ... Who hath it? he that died o’ Wednesday. Doth he feel it? no. Doth he hear it? no. ‘Tis insensible, then. Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? no. Why? detraction will not suffer it.” You can almost hear the audience shouting “No” as they join in Falstaff’s “catechism” but they will react differently when it is skilfully wielded in *Julius Caesar*, where Mark Antony works on the Roman mob. He has not come to praise Caesar, no, for “The noble Brutus says he was ambitious and Brutus is an honourable man. So are they all, all honourable men.” By the time he has repeated this often enough - with little parentheses on Caesar’s kindness, generosity and victories on behalf of the people - the mob is baying for blood and the high-minded Brutus fleeing for his life.

And then there is “the Lover” – in fact a comic world of lovers - and the word “love” in all blinkered agonies and ecstasies. Passionate springtime, short-lived young love: happy love that first checks on the lady’s economic prospects: cautious love between two people who have been hurt and can communicate only through aggressive banter - “merry war”: and love that “like to the lark at break of day arising / From sullen earth sings hymns at heaven’s gate”.

Finally we have the Revenger, but he, too, is never a “type” in Shakespeare. Hamlet delays, not just because he is a thinker rather than man of action, but because he is never sure whether his “father’s ghost”, who laid the obligation on him, is an “honest ghost” or a devil working on his grief and depression to damn him. Prospero, the “wronged Duke of Milan” succeeds through his magic books

PRAYER VIGILS FOR WORLD PEACE

All of us must be very concerned and worried by the current world scene, with violent conflict and threats to peace in so many places. There is a sense of despair. Is there anything that we can do? As people of faith, Yes! There is! We have the power of Prayer at our disposal. We are likely to be praying for peace in our personal times of prayer: and each Service, when we are gathered as a community of God's people, includes corporate prayers of intercession.

As a further opportunity to gather as a praying community, the World Church & Public Issues Group is organising a series of four Prayer Vigils for World Peace. Two of these, on Saturday 13th April and Saturday, 14th

September, will be short events on Zoom from 12 noon to 12.45.

There will also be a full day Prayer Vigil on Thursday, June 27th to be held in the Emmanuel Room at Downing Place URC. Each hour of the day will include silence interspersed with words and quiet music. You are invited to attend for as long or short a time as you wish and the usual Thursday Service will be incorporated into the Vigil.

The second Zoom event on Saturday, 14th September will be followed by another full day Vigil in the Emmanuel Room at Downing Place from 8am to 6pm on Friday 15th November. If you are unable to attend in person, it is hoped that you will join the Church community in supporting prayers at the same times.

Chris Wright, for World Church & Public Issues Group



THE WEDNESDAY LUNCHTIME CONCERT SERIES

When I am not working for Downing Place, I am a keen singer and love music, so it was a joy to be asked to continue arranging the regular Lunchtime Concerts when I started my role at Emmanuel URC in December 2015.

At that time, concerts took a break during January and August, and our audiences averaged around 50-60. The donations (towards the church's mission) usually came to between £60 and £100. People came to have lunch in the Fair Shares Café and then attend the concert, and Wednesday was the café's busiest day. As well as regulars, the location attracted tourists passing to and from the Fitzwilliam Museum. There was a great buzz on Wednesdays, and even if you didn't go to the concert, you could sit with a cup of tea and enjoy the music in the café.

Behind the scenes, we received (and continue to receive) regular and numerous enquiries about performance opportunities from performers of a very high calibre - often students from the Royal College of Music seeking opportunities to perform in front of an audience. So I started taking bookings for August and January, to try to accommodate as many performers as possible. The audience was delighted. The performers were delighted. Numbers during those months thrived.

Then, the concerts underwent two very significant changes of circumstance - firstly, the closure of the café in July 2019, and secondly the relocation to Downing Place in May 2021 - with a pandemic in the middle!

When the café closed, some people expressed doubts as to whether the concerts could continue. I believed that music was so important that people would come to hear it anyway, and I continued to take bookings from performers. While loyal café customers were obviously disappointed, the concerts still continued to thrive - the figures I keep for the copyright reporting show no drop in numbers or takings as a result of the closure.

Given our impending departure from the Emmanuel building, I only scheduled 2020 concerts up to the end of June, to allow time for us to pack the church up in July and move out in August. We all know what happened in March 2020. Our last concert was on 11 March - the following week, the London-based performer emailed me to say he had been advised not to travel; days later and we were in lockdown. With reluctance, I wrote to all our scheduled performers, to tell them their concerts would have to be cancelled. One performer was so disappointed to lose her June 2020 slot that she wrote to me "Don't you think this will all be over by then?" We all know the answer to that!

It was in a spirit of optimism, then, that I started booking our 2021 concert series. We didn't have a firm date for reoccupying the Downing Place building, but I thought May would allow for a reasonable margin of safety. We also had no idea what stage the pandemic would have reached by May 2021, but we started booking performers anyway, with the caveat that if we were all locked down again, we might have to cancel. Covid precautions proliferated - we could only permit a maximum of 30 in the audience, socially distanced, and for the first time people had to pre-book. To cap it all, we were in a different location. Would the audience be interested in coming back?

The inaugural Wednesday concert in our new home at Downing Place was given on 19 May 2021 by young pianist Zacharias Brandman, now one of our most popular regulars, who has been playing for us since he was 16. The concert 'sold out'.

People were overjoyed that they could experience live music again! Performers were delighted to once again have an opportunity to engage with a live audience. And there were unexpected boosts to morale - as one singer said to me, "It's the first time one of my concerts has 'sold out'!" Restrictions on numbers were lifted in late July 2021, and numbers remained



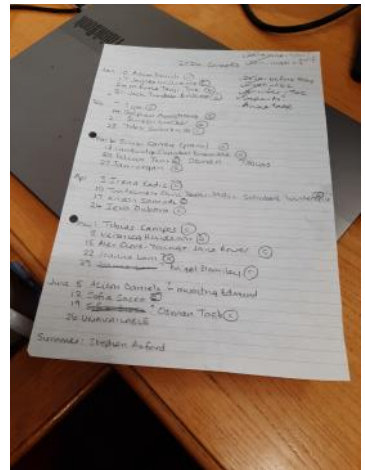
Zach Brandman kicking off the 2021 Lunchtime Concert series in style!

cautious for a while, but by November 2021 the audience numbered between 60 and 100 people every week. Donations were now for the monthly Special Cause, and regularly topped £200 each week. Not only were we back in business, but audience numbers, donations and applications from prospective performers were all flourishing! They have continued to do so, on all levels - concert donations contributed two thirds of the Downing Place monthly Special Cause voluntary donations in 2023.

How to handle all the requests from performers wanting to come and perform for us? When I first started, concerts were booked in tranches of a few months at a time. As I continued to receive enquiries from performers who were new to us, I gave slots to as many as possible. As a result, the calendar filled up for many months ahead, then a year ahead... At one point, I did not send out an email to the regular performers inviting them to book a slot, as I had more than 12 months' worth of concerts in the diary already. I discovered my error when I started getting emails from disappointed regulars who thought for some reason they had been taken off our list! A new and fairer system was needed.....

After some experimentation, concerts are now booked in the summer (July/ August) for the following year. I send an email to our 'regulars' (anyone who has been before and wants to come back becomes a 'regular' - some of these are new people who came to play alongside a 'regular', or people who stepped in at the last moment to fill a cancellation - there are many ways in!) plus any new performers who have contacted us during the year asking if they can come. At one point the list was over 150 names, all competing for around 50 slots a year, so I had to do some 'pruning' and remove those we had not heard from for a while. That still left over 100 performers, and the numbers are increasing all the time.

Once I have sent the email, the floodgates then open and my inbox is deluged! Some people can come any time, some can only come out of term, some always come at the same time of year. My first cut is a messy sheet of A4, in pencil, with ticks and question marks; names of those who are flexible get jotted in the margins to be slotted in when those with limited availability are safely allocated.... By the end of July, I am almost fully booked, up to the end of December of the following year. This can come as a nasty shock to those who reply late - I have to tell them that we are fully booked for the next 17 months!



It also means that when essential acoustic works are scheduled to take place in the Church, and I am asked to 'postpone' the concert, I have a real problem - because there are no free slots to use. Our performers generously give their time and talents for free, commenting on how much they enjoy performing for our large and appreciative audience - cancelling a concert is not something we would do without extensively exploring other options.

The 2024 concert series being born....

This brings me to the news that our scheduled concert on 10 April, a performance of Schubert's *Winterreise* by local tenor Tim Palmer, will now take place at the Pembroke Auditorium - formerly known as Emmanuel United Reformed Church ... in order to allow the acoustics work to take place at Downing Place. For one week only, the concert series returns to its roots! We are extremely grateful to the Bursar of Pembroke College and his team for enabling this to happen. The concert will begin at the slightly later time of 1.15pm so those who turn up at Downing Place can walk down. Perhaps you'd like to come?

Ann Auger

APRIL SPECIAL CAUSE - THE PHOENIX TRUST



The Phoenix Trust (Milton) Ltd, which we abbreviate to just Phoenix, is a vibrant charity, founded in 2006 and situated on the outskirts of Cambridge, in Milton. Phoenix offers experience of the world of work to young people and adults with a range of learning disabilities and special, additional or complex needs.

Phoenix makes a range of paving and garden accessories on site from both wood and concrete. Although the charity is small, it makes a big difference to the lives of people with learning disabilities or complex needs, through the provision of a meaningful experience of work and the development of social and life skills

The site has a concrete factory, carpentry workshops, a kitchen garden and canteen kitchen, and is open to the public for the sale of products produced on site.

Phoenix offers experience in a range of work activities -

- a concrete factory producing a variety of handmade paving slabs and garden ornaments
- carpentry workshops producing garden furniture and wildlife accessories
- a garden growing vegetables for cooking and sometimes plants for sale
- a kitchen canteen providing daily hot meals for our workforce and cakes for sale

The charity also endeavours to embed essential life skills in all their training, and co-workers are encouraged to develop their abilities in basic numeracy, literacy and ICT during their working day. They strongly promote team working and the practice of skills such as time management, basic budgeting and independent travel.

You can make a donation on any Sunday using the envelopes provided; or at any of our Wednesday Lunchtime Concerts. There will be a Retiring Collection on Sunday 21 April when card donations will be available.

PREVIOUS SPECIAL CAUSES AND OTHER DONATIONS

FEBRUARY SPECIAL CAUSE - ROWAN



Our February contributions for Rowan totalled £2,061.78, as follows:

£529.61 Retiring Collection

£1,249.67 Wednesday Lunchtime Concerts

£32.50 Gift Aid and other donations

£250 Contribution from York Street



CAMBRIDGE4UKRAINE



Our very enjoyable 'Come and Sing' event on 25 February raised £905.33 for our friends from Cambridge4Ukraine, to support their continued campaign for an end to the war, and their continued work among Ukrainian nationals in the local area.



'JUST HELPING' CHRISTMAS TREE COLLECTION



A big heartfelt **thank you** for your support during the Christmas Tree Collection 2024!

Your generosity this year raised **£1,187,206** which will make a significant impact on our **56** partnering charities and many other participating groups within their local communities across England, Wales, and Scotland.

Volunteers collected and recycled **65,562** Christmas trees saving more than **one million** kilograms of CO₂e from being released into the atmosphere!

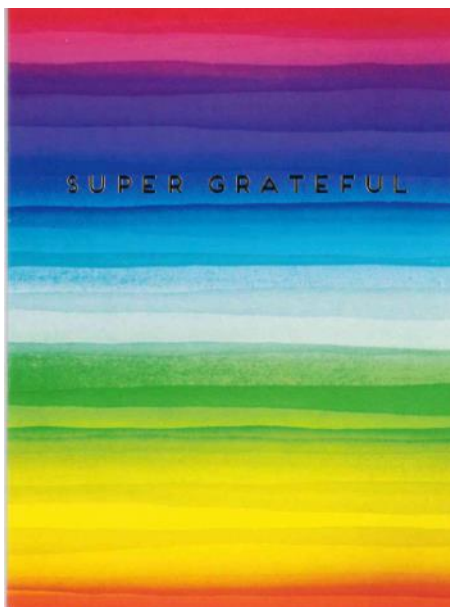
THROUGH THE ROOF

Dear Nigel, Ann and all at Downing Place
URC

I just wanted to say a huge THANK YOU!

On behalf of "Through the Roof, the
church disability charity, for the gift of
£2,104.88 raised in December 2023.

As a small charity, an amount like that
makes a huge difference. It will enable us
to, for example, refurbish and provide 50
wheelchairs for disabled people in
developing countries; or to provide BSL
interpreting at 5 full-day events; or to
subsidise/support up to 14 UK disabled
holiday-makers or their carers. Thank you
again



William Shakespeare: Sonnet 29

[Editor: including this sonnet is pure indulgence on my
part, but Janet (p.20) provides me with an excuse ...]

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth sings hymns at heaven's gate;

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.





**Christian Aid Week 2024 –
12th to 19th May**

Only a few weeks to go until Christian Aid Week!

This year's Christian Aid Week appeal takes us to Burundi, one of Africa's poorest countries. Aline Nibogora was a victim of domestic violence and lived in poverty and homelessness until Christian Aid's partners helped her to rebuild her life and be reunited with her family.

Read more about Aline on the Christian Aid website, and in next month's Place Matters.



Credit: Christian Aid/Armstrong Too

Important dates for CA Week 2024:

**Sunday 12th May, 6.30 p.m. at St. Mary's Parish Church, Gt. Shelford.
Christian Aid Week service**

The Vicar of St. Mary's, Gt. Shelford, the Rev. Julie Norris, has offered the Church's hospitality, and the speaker will be Nick Georgiadis, Christian Aid's national Director of Fundraising and Supporter Engagement. You are all very welcome.

**Wednesday 15th May, 1.00 p.m. at Downing Place
Lunchtime concert, Changemakers**

by Jane Bower and Alex Clare-Young, to support Christian Aid—see below.

Sunday 19th May, 11.00 a.m.

our **Downing Place morning service** will focus on Christian Aid.

There will be a retiring collection for Christian Aid, our monthly cause for May.

Please plan to support Christian Aid in any way you can, their work is needed more than ever.

Sheila Porrer

Wednesday May 15th 2024 1-2pm

CHANGEMAKERS

A concert for Christian Aid week

Jane Bower (voice) Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young (clarsach harp)



**Following their Christian Aid concert *Small Things* in 2023, Alex and Jane return with a mix of the beautiful and unusual in words and music.
Free entry, all donations to the work of Christian Aid**

SPRING CLEANING

Squeaky-clean, pristine-green shoots spear skyward

Pledged to a polish, Ciffing with sap,

Rinsoed with rain, rooting through loam

Inching and piercing, Astonishing rotten

Nuggets of leaf matter, iced, winter-weary

Gobbets of mud, defrosted humus.

Conditioned in Comfort the tumble-dried clouds,

Lathered in Lux the sky's net curtains;

Elating the sullen, sleep-sodden garden

A bigness of light sweeps its Cillited sponge,

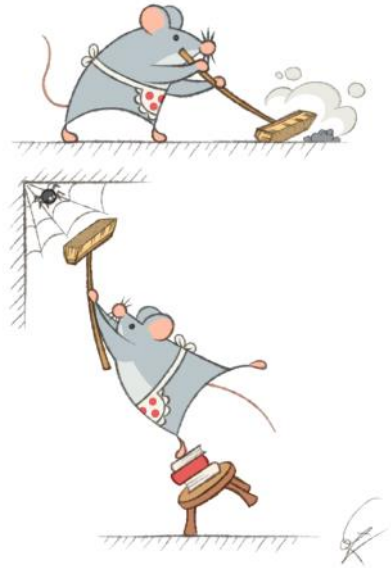
Newly and now, annual, awaited,

Immaculate freshening, Flashing, Febrezed,

Newly and now, breath-catching, eye-bright,

Gasp at the Vim of the Spring, cleaning.

Jane Bower February 2023





Celebrate!



EASTERN SYNOD
BIG DAY OUT
SATURDAY 8TH JUNE
TRINITY PARK, IPSWICH
10.00AM - 4.00PM

A day for all ages from 0-100

RELAX HAVE FUN CELEBRATE CREATE REFLECT PLAY

£8 contribution per adult
children Under 16 free

Refreshments on arrival & picnic lunch

Celebrating our faith, Hope and Love in Action

Booking on line <https://forms.office.com/e/6jwigUVLMB>



EASTERN SYNOD BIG DAY OUT

SATURDAY 8 JUNE 2024

This our story....

A day of activities, talks, worship and fellowship for everyone connected with Eastern Synod.

You can book your place here: <https://forms.office.com/e/6jwigUVLMB>

Come and Relax: Enjoy the setting of Trinity Park, Ipswich and relax in the grounds.

Create: Through a celebration art project and music, including drumming/percussion workshop, Drama and dance and the opportunity to sing in a live one-off production of 'Jonah Man Jazz'

Reflect: Celebrating our Faith, hope and love in Action through Bible study, prayer spaces, storytelling. Exploring Faith in Action including through displays, conversation and all age activities.

Have fun: In the grounds with a craft marquee, bouncy castle and slide, giant games, and fairground sideshows, including balloon modelling, face painting and bubble shows

Celebrate: Worship together and eat together

All Day Event

(Sign-up sheets for those able to offer lifts, and those in need of lifts, will be available on Reception from May)

APRIL DIARY

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Tue	02-Apr-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	03-Apr-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Irena Radic (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	04-Apr-24	Midweek Worship led by Penny Flynn	11:00am	Church
Thu	04-Apr-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Thu	04-Apr-24	Pioneer Minister's Steering Group	2:30pm	Rooms 1 & 2
Fri	05-Apr-24	Meditation Group	5:30pm	St Columba's Chapel
Sat	06-Apr-24	Safeguarding Training	10:30am	Gibson Hall
Sat	06-Apr-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	07-Apr-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	07-Apr-24	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Dr Janet Tollington	11:00am	Church
Sun	07-Apr-24	Solidarity Prayers	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	07-Apr-24	Open Table/Solidarity Social	7:30pm	The Hub
Tue	09-Apr-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	10-Apr-24	Solidarity Hub - Acorn the Community Union	7:00pm	The Hub
Wed	10-Apr-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Schubert's 'Winterreise' AT THE PEMBROKE AUDITORIUM	1:15pm	Pembroke Auditorium
Thu	11-Apr-24	Prayer Meeting	10:15am	St Columba's Chapel

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Thu	11-Apr-24	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Gibson Hall
Thu	11-Apr-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sat	13-Apr-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	14-Apr-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	14-Apr-24	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Liz Caswell	11:00am	Church
Sun	14-Apr-24	Solidarity Prayers	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	14-Apr-24	Solidarity Social Action Group	7:30pm	The Hub
Mon	15-Apr-24	DEADLINE for booking and paying for the Gibson Lunch	4:30pm	
Tue	16-Apr-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship - 'The Word Together' with Fulbourn URC	2:30pm	Fulbourn URC
Wed	17-Apr-24	DEADLINE for submitting items for 'Place Matters'		
Wed	17-Apr-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Flora Tzanetaki (piano) & Paul Harris (clarinet)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	18-Apr-24	Gibson Lunch	12:30pm	Gibson Hall
Thu	18-Apr-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Thu	18-Apr-24	Midweek Worship led by the Revd Alex Clare-Young	6:00pm	St Columba's Chapel
Fri	19-Apr-24	Meditation Group	5:30pm	St Columba's Chapel

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Sat	20-Apr-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	21-Apr-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	21-Apr-24	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Nigel Uden followed by a Retiring Collection for the Phoenix Trust	11:00am	Church
Sun	21-Apr-24	Solidarity Social Drop In	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	21-Apr-24	Open Table Communion Service	7:00pm	Church and The Hub
Tue	23-Apr-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Tue	23-Apr-24	Elders' Meeting - Approval of Accounts	7:30pm	Zoom
Wed	24-Apr-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Ieva Dubova (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	25-Apr-24	Midweek Worship with Communion led by the Revd Dr Janet Tollington	1:00pm	Church
Thu	25-Apr-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sat	27-Apr-24	Solidarity Hub Forest Gathering	4:00pm	Venue tbc
Sat	27-Apr-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	28-Apr-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	28-Apr-24	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Sun	28-Apr-24	Solidarity Prayers	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	28-Apr-24	Solidarity Scripture	7:30pm	The Hub
Tue	30-Apr-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2.30pm	St Athanasios' Church

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Wed	01-May-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Tobias Campos (tenor)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	02-May-24	Midweek Worship	11:00am	Church
Thu	02-May-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Fri	03-May-24	Meditation Group	5:30pm	St Columba's Chapel
Sat	04-May-24	Nightlite	10:00pm	Emmanuel Room
Sun	05-May-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	05-May-24	Sunday Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Sun	05-May-24	Solidarity Prayers	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	05-May-24	Open Table/Solidarity Social	7:30pm	The Hub

LUNCHTIME CONCERTS - WEDNESDAYS AT 1PM

Free Lunchtime Concerts with a retiring collection for our monthly Special Cause. Booking is not necessary. Refreshments available before and after the concert. Come and bring friends!

- 3 April Irena Radic (piano)
- 10 April Tim Palmer (tenor) & Chris Dexter-Mills (piano)
1.15pm **AT THE PEMBROKE AUDITORIUM** (see p.25)
- 17 April Flora Tzanetaki (piano) & Paul Harris (clarinet)
- 24 April Ieva Dubova (piano)

<https://downingplaceurc.org/lunchtime-concerts/>

LECTIONARY FOR APRIL

These are the readings suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary, as in ROOTS, the material used by our Children's Ministry team. They may be altered if that is the preacher's wish.

7 April (Easter 2)

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

14 April (Easter 3)

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

21 April (Easter 4)

Acts 4:5-12

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

28 April (Easter 5)

Acts 8:26-40

Psalm 22:25-31

1 John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8

5 May (Easter 6)

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17





MAGAZINE EDITOR: Tim Rowland

ITEMS FOR MAGAZINE:

Please send items to both Tim Rowland and Ann Auger
(ann@downingplaceurc.org)

WEB EDITOR: Jess Uden

Please send all items to be included in the May edition to both Tim and Ann by the cut off date of **Wednesday 17 April.**

The May edition will be available from **Sunday 28 April.**