



**DOWNING PLACE
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
CAMBRIDGE**

PLACE MATTERS



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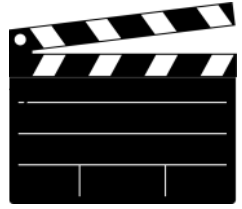
*Cover photograph: Aline Nibogora in a prayer position
during a family spiritual session in Kayagoro village, Makambam Burundi.*

Credit: Christian Aid/ Armstrong Too

Read more about Aline on p.18

FROM THE MINISTER

Looking back, I realise that I am no film buff. Like watching television, going to the cinema has never been something to which I was very committed. That said, there are some films I recall from growing up in the sixties. Throughout my ministry, when the diary allows, I have had a post prandial nap on a Sunday, when I can still fall asleep nostalgically with things like *Reach for the Sky* playing in front of me. I know it so well that whenever I wake up, I know exactly what's happening.



Some films, though, have really impacted, even shaped me.

I recall my eleventh birthday treat was being taken by parents to see the 1968 film version of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. It was recently released, and we trekked adventurously to the Odeon Leicester Square, via a meal at the then equally novel Angus Steakhouse nearby. The film *Oliver!* enthralled me, with its sparkling musical score by Lionel Bart. Despite songs like *It's a fine life*, the film indelibly introduced this ever-so-comfortable Home Counties lad to the reality of poverty in 19th-century London to which 'Boz' was addressing himself in the original 1830s novel. And poverty still matters.

Two quite different films influenced me to serve the church overseas. One is the 1958 interpretation of Gladys Aylward's life, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. A tenacious British woman becomes a missionary and runs an inn for travelling merchants in China through the 1930s and 40s, during the Japanese invasion and the tumultuous years leading up to the Second World War. Something in that movie stirred an interest – probably naive and romanticised – in The Church in other parts of the world.

I've read of the Chinese idea that there are five happinesses: good luck, prosperity, longevity, happiness and wealth. It has been suggested that the film offers the idea that each person must identify for themselves what their sixth happiness is, but that Gladys Aylward and her fellow missionaries wanted to offer the Good News of Jesus as that 'pearl without price'. In retrospect, I think my own missionary purpose at that point was less about zeal for converting people to Christianity than appreciation of the global reach and culturally diverse richness of the Body of Christ. As I prepared for ministry at *The Congregational College* in Manchester, I vaguely formed a sense that maybe some of the years of my active service would be overseas. I don't think I told many people about that, but I am grateful that others apparently spotted it and sent me to do a placement in Johannesburg for a year.

That experience in South Africa was the cause of Bethan and me returning there in 1987 for a further six years. A totally different missionary film was released in 1986. Robert de Niro and Jeremy Irons starred in *The Mission*. As one synopsis puts it, ‘Jesuit priest Father Gabriel (Irons) enters the Guarani lands in South America with the purpose of converting the natives to Christianity. He soon builds a mission, where he is joined by Rodrigo Mendoza (De Niro), a reformed slave trader seeking redemption. When a treaty transfers the land from Spain to Portugal, the Portuguese government wants to capture the natives for slave labour. Mendoza and Gabriel resolve to defend the mission but disagree on how to accomplish the task’. We watched that at the cinema in Heaton Moor, just down the road from the churches I was then serving in Stockport, but when the call to return to South Africa had already been accepted. *The Mission’s* highlighting issues of justice for those so easily exploited was profoundly prescient of what would be a considerable influence upon my life and work in the churches I served there. Crucially though, it was in the crucible of the struggle to replace *apartheid* that I was arrested by the essential integration of proclaiming the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and of giving that practical expression in standing with people denied the dignity and opportunity of equality. Neither was complete without the other.

Although of a very different genre and theme, a year before *The Mission* another film was released, *Out of Africa*. In 20th-century colonial Kenya, a Danish baroness and plantation owner has a passionate love affair with a free-spirited big-game hunter. As if it was yesterday, I recall being in that same Heaton Moor picture house as John Barry’s Oscar-winning score accompanied the opening scene of a train steaming across the African veld, and Meryl Streep murmured Karen Blixen’s first line, ‘I had a farm in Africa. I had a farm in Africa at the foot of the Ngong Hills’. It was nothing like the urban sprawl of Johannesburg and Soweto to which we would go a year later, but it was Africa, and as a beloved mentor who himself served there would put it, ‘When you return from Africa, you will leave part of your heart there.’



Another film that I will not forget was the 1994, *Priest*. A gay Catholic priest finds out whilst hearing confession that a young girl is being sexually abused by her father, and has to decide how to deal with both that secret and his own. I saw this whilst at a conference to which I had gone in the north of England. By then, we were back in England, serving a church in St Annes on the Sea, cheek by jowl with Blackpool. The HIV/AIDS epidemic was at its searing height, not least amongst the gay community there. I was way out of my depth, and until then had not really processed questions of human sexuality. I needed to learn. The conference was alright. But the film was pivotal. The priest concludes that he'd rather be 'hated for what he was than loved for what he was not'. The origin of that phrase is debated, though Andrew Gide used it in *Autumn Leaves* (1950), the year before he died. Ever since, those words have been at the heart of my thinking about human sexuality and gender. Even when I do not understand, less still walk in someone else's moccasins, I hear Linus Roache reminding me that these are not matters of choice, but 'who I am.'



I have never been attracted by those epic films that portray the life and death of Christ. I do not belittle them. They work for some. For me though, the definitive witness of the Scriptures is sufficient to feed and form my faith about the person and work of Jesus. And I am always learning something new from them. Nevertheless, as I explore how to respond to that good news, how to live in the light of it, I recognise that films – even when I do not agree with or enjoy them - can be powerful vehicles for shaping our philosophy, for challenging our thinking, for influencing our faith and convictions. I am grateful for them.

Nigel Uden

May 2024

All images via Creative Commons

FROM THE EDITOR

It's Saturday morning, and as I sit to write, the sun is shining and "April is in my mistress' face"¹. Though by the time most readers open the printed copy, it will be time to sing "Now is the month of Maying"². It's the Saturday of Easter week – and my late mother's birthday: I'll email my brother. Just to add to the time-confusion, let me take you back to January, to Epiphany Sunday, and to our celebration of the visit of those three 'wise men' to the neonatal Jesus. Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh signify the infant recipient's kingship and his priestly role, and anticipate his death. But the gifts tell us something about the givers too. In his Epiphany Sunday sermon, Nigel Uden, minister at Downing Place URC, suggested that those visitors from the East

are *risk-takers* – they came 'from the East to Jerusalem'; people who are *inquisitive* – 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?'; people who are *perceptive* – 'we observed his star at its rising'; people who are *devout* – we 'have come to pay him homage'.

Most of the Sunday morning services include a 'sharing together' item, when something sacred is often considered in a familiar, everyday context. Those gathered at Downing Place – of all ages – sometimes bring, do, or say something to assist that reflection. For that Epiphany service, Nigel had invited those who might be coming to bring along an item of some sort that somehow captured who they are. In that sharing time, we laid these items beside a crib at the front of the church, so that anyone could see them. I've come to appreciate the notion of our sense of 'identity' – not how others see us, but how we see ourselves: who do I think that I am? We were invited to bring them to Jesus, just as those wise men had done.

Well now – a geologist brought his hammer; a student her piano book. A DVD captured a writer/performer in performance. A granny brought her pinny, which told of her cooking; and a baker, a piece of Christmas cake. A needlewoman brought a knitting needle.

And Nigel? His offering at the crib was the fountain pen that he'd inherited from his father. That pen captured something of Nigel's identity because, as he explained "I do a lot of writing: sermons, articles, cards and letters". Indeed he does – most of it now on a keyboard, I imagine. I always look forward to his

¹ Madrigal composer Thomas Morley, son of a Norwich brewer, became organist at St Paul's cathedral in 1588

² Thomas Morley again: with the 'Maying' lyrics steeped in double-entendre ...

monthly contributions to *Place Matters*. Then there is the text for Sunday services: many readers may not be aware that they can revisit the sermon ‘script’ in the sermons folder of the Downing Place URC website.³ I can recommend it, not least in order to see the footnotes embedded in Nigel’s sermon texts. I’ve indulged in a few footnotes of my own in this Editorial.

All of which brings me (not before time, you might be thinking) to Eastertide, and anticipation of Pentecost. I’m aware, as I grow (even) older, that I now encounter each season of the Christian year with a fresh and vital sense of wonder – of surprise even! During Advent and Holy Week I find myself asking “Did they really?”; “How did she (Mary) feel about that?”; “That’s amazing”. In addition to Sunday worship, the URC Daily Devotions and the Downing Place house group meetings have prompted and informed these reflections, and my renewed sense of amazement. Let me take this opportunity to thank (and congratulate!) those house group study leaders for their knowledge, insight and preparation, as they gently led us through readings and discussions each week. In Lent 2024, we followed Mark’s account of the road to Calvary. We considered difficult questions, such as: was Judas Iscariot’s betrayal somehow a necessary part of the Great Plan? Ann Phillips asked the same question in her poetry contribution to *Place Matters* last October. The second of those October poems somehow captured Judas Iscariot as a necessary participant in the tragedy that would allow God’s plan to be fulfilled. It reads “He was my dancing-partner steady eye always set on mine as in a mirror”.

Then on 10th March, the fourth Sunday in Lent (but nearly three weeks before Good Friday), the topic of Michael Wilson’s sermon was crucifixion – you can read that one too, on the Downing Place website sermons page. The readings in that service had included Deuteronomy 21: 18-23, with “When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse”. Michael looked at the gathered congregation and said. “Let’s be clear: that is not Christian doctrine. Disturbingly, the Old Testament and the Koran agree: to be hung on a tree – to be crucified - is to be eternally cast out from the family of God’s people”.

And so we arrived in Holy Week – somehow a rather ‘difficult’ week for me this year, and I was grateful for the assistance of Nigel, Jennifer and Ian, enabled by David and Jess, in four 20-minute YouTube Reflections⁴ following St John’s

³ <https://downingplaceurc.org/sermons/>


⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7GQuqsJi5A2PFacVyp4Y0g>

gospel and Bach's St John Passion - surpassed only by a Rowland family get-together on Easter Saturday to celebrate a grandson's special birthday. Easter Day could not come soon enough: He is Risen - He is Risen indeed!

Suffice then, to conclude this May-time Editorial with words from Nigel's Easter Day sermon:

Indescribable though it is, when all else is said and done, resurrection is best understood in the imperfect tense. It is not the past tense, something that happened and is completed. This is a past action that keeps on giving.

Tim Rowland
9th April 2024



THE APRIL 2024 SOLAR ECLIPSE

Robert Smith writes:

As most of us will know, a rare and remarkable event took place last month – a total eclipse of the Sun. It was on April 8th. Solar eclipses happen somewhere in the world several times in the year – caused by the Moon in its orbit around the earth coming directly between the Sun and some point on the Earth's surface. By coincidence, the Moon and the Sun cover almost exactly the same area of the sky when viewed from the Earth, and an eclipse doesn't last very long at any particular place. However, as the Moon is moving all the time, the place where the eclipse happens moves as well, leaving a 'track' on the Earth's surface, tracing the points at which the eclipse is visible.



So why was last week's eclipse so remarkable? Two reasons. First of all, the track covered more large cities than any previous eclipse; it started on the Pacific Coast of Mexico and finished in Eastern Canada. This meant that more people had the opportunity to see the eclipse than at any other recorded eclipse. The other reason is that the eclipse lasted longer at a particular place than usual – most eclipses last only a minute or two, this one lasted more than four minutes, giving the opportunity to appreciate the various other things that happen during an eclipse: it gets cold, birds stop singing and start to roost. The most spectacular effect is the appearance of the Sun's corona – its tenuous outer atmosphere. The corona is very hot (about 2 million degrees) but much fainter than the Sun's surface, so is only visible when the Sun itself is 'hidden'.



Image ©NASA/Keegan Barber

The only eclipse I have seen was one in the Channel Islands (Alderney) in August 1999, but we didn't have good weather, and we only saw it through cloud. I understand that the weather across Mexico and North America was mostly more favourable, so there have been some splendid photographs.

For more detail, a video of the event and a map of the eclipse path, visit:

<https://science.nasa.gov/eclipses/future-eclipses/eclipse-2024/>

FROM OUR ECUMENICAL CORRESPONDENT

II : The Greek Orthodox Church

The church halfway down Cherry Hinton Road was a building of Emmanuel URC until 2015, when it became a church of Cambridge's Greek Orthodox parish. But who are they?

In Episode I of this quarterly 'column' on Christian diversity (*Place Matters*, February p.18), I mentioned the official view in the Roman Empire after 379, that the whole Empire was Christian. But for nearly a century before that, that Empire had not been centred on Rome. Separate capitals had been established in the Latin-speaking West, and in the East where '*koiné*' Greek was the common language. In 330, Constantine I moved the Eastern centre to his 'New Rome', Constantinople: Emperors continued to reign there long after 'Old Rome' passed under the rule of Goths, Lombards and Franks.

It was to Constantinople or neighbouring cities that Emperors summoned the earliest general councils of Christian bishops: one of 381 in the capital itself recognised its bishop as second in dignity only to the bishop of Rome. Changes in the geography of Eastern Christianity followed, as it embraced the Slavic territories but encountered the northward spread of Islam. The church in Cyprus became independent (autocephalous) in 431, whilst mainland Greece remained directly under Constantinople.

The later Empire in the East developed separately from the West, Constantinople looking askance at the Germanic 'Holy Roman Empire': the Christian community followed suit. This political and linguistic divide caused frequent misunderstanding, and whilst Rome's bishops became steadily more independent of Imperial influence, the opposite happened in Constantinople. Growing pretensions of the papacy, appalling behaviour by western Crusaders on their way to Jerusalem, the western change in the Nicene Creed (referring to the Spirit 'proceeding from the Father and the Son'), but above all cultural divergence paved the way for the institutional split of 1054, when the bishops of Rome and Constantinople ended their mutual communion and the four Eastern Patriarchs continued on their own way, Constantinople's Patriarch being called 'Ecumenical' as senior figure in the 'orthodox' Christian world.

The Empire, having lost Cyprus in 1152, fell altogether by 1460 when southern Greece became an Ottoman Turkish province. Suspicion and rivalry explained western reluctance to come to the Emperor's aid, save on terms the orthodox population refused to accept. The tolerant Muslim approach to 'people of the Book' allowed Constantinople's Christians to worship in their own way under their own bishops, but their Patriarch was now located in Turkish Istanbul. It

was in Greece and Cyprus that the Empire's language remained the mother tongue, and the ancient monasteries on Mount Athos continued their way of life.

The lost Christian Empire perhaps explains the strong orthodox adherence to what could be retained – insistence on what the various churches had agreed (regarding both doctrine and church organisation) and resistance to developments not so agreed. Continuity matters. The wording and vestments of Eastern worship continued to reflect ceremonial of the former Imperial court: bishops' headdress resembled the Emperor's diadem. Sometimes orthodox churches seem to the outsider incredibly concerned with detail – yet their notion of 'economy' (apparent relaxation of a general rule in the overriding interest of saving souls) occasionally gives greater flexibility than Western approaches.



And so to the orthodox in England. Unlike Roman Catholicism, orthodox worship never used just one sacred language. This divided the orthodox diaspora into language groups, and each looked to the mother country's church authorities. By the time refugees from Eastern wars and revolutions reached England in significant numbers, legal restrictions on Dissent had been relaxed. They were able to buy land, organise and assemble for worship like any other nonconformists. Though some in the Church of England were enthusiastic about a tradition with bishops but without the papacy, many protestants found

orthodox worship too exotic for much common ground. Nevertheless the Ecumenical Patriarchate participated from 1927 in gatherings that became the World Council of Churches.

In 1922 the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain (ATGB) was created. Its churches met the spiritual needs of all Greek orthodox: in 1968 those settled in Cambridge became St Athanasios' congregation of that archdiocese. Exiles from Northern Cyprus in the 1970s swelled the ranks of England's Greek speakers, though looking also to their own bishops. The congregation enjoyed the hospitality of other Cambridge churches until purchasing Emmanuel's building. That the former vestry housed a URC congregation for several more years, and our Tuesday Fellowship still meets in St Athanasios' Hall, testifies to continuing amicable relations. Greeks also play a part in Cambridge's Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, which has enabled a more academic look at orthodoxy since 1999.

Entering St Athanasios today, one sees pews inherited from URC days surrounded by icons and facing the iconostasis (the screen separating them from the altar). Central pews are hardly typical of orthodox services: worshippers usually stand, though 'the weakest go to the wall' where benches are provided. But in other respects much the same liturgy is used as in Nicosia. Athens or Istanbul; a lot can be learned from it about orthodox beliefs on the sacraments and the saints.

Icons are a striking feature of all orthodox churches. Depicting the Trinity and holy figures of the past, they are painted but not carved (due to the Second Commandment), and considered to link the worshipper to the spiritual world as the Church understands it. Believers often 'salute the icons' with a kiss before taking their place in the congregation. The restoration of icons after two periods in the 8th and 9th centuries when they were banned was greeted with great celebration: one often values most what one has nearly lost.

The chanting of a male voice choir has replaced the organ; the clergy's vestments are gorgeous; adults and toddlers alike receive Communion. The sign of the Cross is made frequently, but from right to left (Westerners touch the left breast first). Interestingly, when speaking of the 'bells and smells' of Anglo-Catholicism one imagines two different things; but in orthodoxy these come together, since tinkling bells are attached to the chains of the censer. Orthodox worship, in short, appeals to all the senses: it is sometimes spoken of as 'a foretaste of Heaven'.

Augur Pearce



PIONEER MINISTRY UPDATE - ACORN AND BUSES

Alex Clare-Young writes: One of the aspects of pioneer ministry which I haven't shared much about is my work with social action organisations. Social action organisations – sometimes known as activist groups – are groups which undertake action to support social justice, which includes work that aligns with Downing Place Church's aims of wellbeing, inclusion and sustainability. When I arrived in Cambridge, I soon found that there are many young adults engaging in these groups, and that work for social justice is a large part of what young adults living in and around our city feel that churches should be engaged in – this is their answer to that famous question 'What Would Jesus Do?'.

The group that I have begun to meet with regularly is called Acorn, and it is a Community Union. Community unions are like trade unions, but are for people who live in a particular area, rather than people who work in a particular trade. Acorn Cambridge is a group of people who live in Cambridge who support fellow members and campaign for justice. Much of the support work is around supporting tenants to enjoy their right to housing, as well as supporting local people in communicating well with local councils and services.



Alex setting up at Mill Road Winter Fair with Acorn members Michael and Lewis.

Acorn also takes on a major public campaign annually. This year, our campaign is around bus franchising. Acorn Cambridge explains that, ‘Bus service franchising means that decisions about routes, frequencies, hours and days of operation, and fares are taken by a Transport Authority which is democratically accountable to the public’. We have been speaking with local people on doorsteps and at bus stops, and we are keen to ensure that the future of public transport in Cambridge includes regular buses, sufficient routes, effective tracking, night-time transport and affordable fares. If you would like to read more about this campaign, visit acornuk.good.do/east/CPCA-take-back-our-buses.



Members of the public begin to engage with questions around our local buses at Mill Road Winter Fair.

I am sometimes asked how different parts of my ministry align with ‘being church’. For me, being church is not primarily – or at least not only – about what we believe, but also about being the body of Christ today. The early church, described in Acts, lived out ten so-called ‘Holy Habits’. Two of those, serving and sharing resources, are clearly and authentically lived out in the work of social action groups. This work isn’t everybody’s cup of tea, but it is something that I believe that the church as a diverse whole is called to. As the Apostle Paul regularly points out, that body needs different people taking on different tasks. One of the tasks for some members of the body of Christ is to work, like Jesus did, for social justice for all people. I believe that, in doing so, Acorn is a part of that body. What do you think?

Pamela Cressey writes:

What a delightful present some of us were given on Easter Sunday. Thank you so much to the Junior Church members for the beautifully decorated crosses to remind us of the joy of Easter. And thank you very much to the minister, elders and members for the lovely colourful plants to brighten our homes. I really appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Monthly Cause for May – Christian Aid

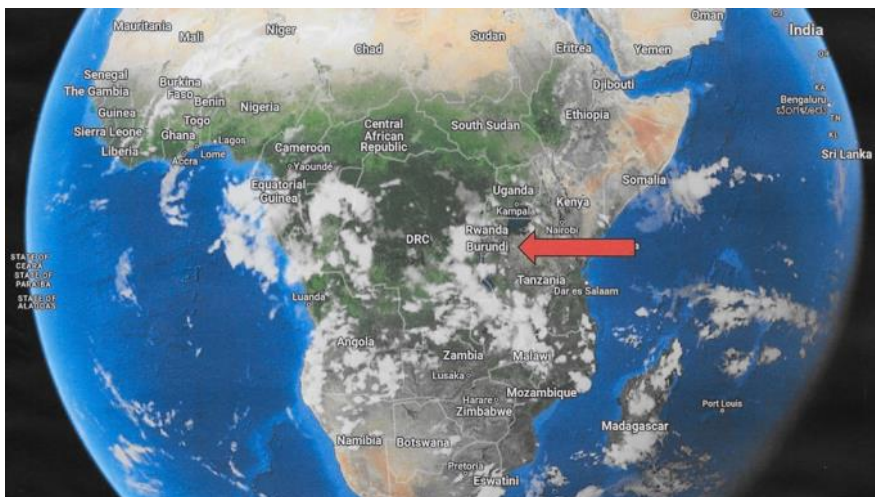


Christian Aid's work continues in the world's most troubled places – Sudan, Ukraine and of course Gaza, whose suffering is in the headlines every day. Working as ever through and with regional partners, it provides food, shelter, medical supplies, hygiene kits and much more.

(Up to date information on what CA is doing in Gaza is at [Middle East Crisis Appeal | Christian Aid](#)).

But away from the headlines Christian Aid supports local communities in many other regions, helping them to build systems to grow prosperity even in the face of all the threats of climate change.

This year the focus is on **Burundi**, a small African country which most of us would struggle to find on a map. It lies in the East of Africa, away from the coast, on the shore of Lake Tanganyika, and surrounded by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Rwanda.



Since it gained independence in 1962 Burundi has suffered unrest and civil war, and repercussions from the genocidal tragedy in its neighbour Rwanda. It is densely populated, and most of its population of around 13 million make a bare

living from agriculture. More than 70 per cent of the population live in poverty, while more than half of children are chronically malnourished.

According to **Philip Galgallo, Christian Aid's Country Director for Burundi:** "In the areas where we work, people without their own small business or income will typically head out on an empty stomach each morning to look for casual work to buy food for the evening. Most only eat once a day. It's not uncommon to live in a one-bedroom house built of unbaked mud brick walls with an iron sheet roof. Unstable buildings like this are exceptionally vulnerable to collapse during the landslides and fierce storms which the climate crisis is making more frequent.

Most families don't have a water supply, so they'll collect water from rivers or communal water points; the threat of water-borne cholera is ever present. In most instances, neighbouring families share toilets, but it's not uncommon for there to be no communal toilet, forcing people to nearby bushes. Similarly, there are no bathrooms or showers. It's a fragile existence that pushes many to the brink of survival."

But Christian Aid is bringing hope to people in Burundi. It has been working there since 1995 when it first offered humanitarian assistance to people surviving the civil conflict. Now, alongside local partners, the organisation helps establish Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). These community-led groups mean people can save and borrow money, making small businesses possible, offering reliable and diverse incomes so families can eat regularly, get medicine when they need it, and build safer homes.



*Aline Nibogora showing Christian Aid and its partners the VSLA account book.
Credit: Christian Aid/ Armstrong Too.*

This year's Christian Aid Week will highlight the story of **Aline**, a 35 year old mother of six children, who has used Christian Aid's help to rebuild her life against all the odds. Married young and a mother at 14, Aline was abused by her husband and ended up on the streets, alone, homeless and hungry. But Christian Aid offered her a training course on how to set up a Village Savings and Loans Association in her local village.

With all she had learned, Aline's dream of getting her children back finally felt possible. She set up a small business selling peanuts and avocados and with her profits was able to buy a bicycle and rent a house. Now she has expanded her business and is building her own house, with bricks she has baked herself. Three of her sons are back with her and she hopes to find her three younger children soon and bring all her family together.

Aline's long and difficult journey out of extreme poverty began with a little support, knowledge and faith from Christian Aid supporters like us.



Aline Nibogora poses with her three sons

Credit: Christian Aid/ Armstrong Too.

What could our donations buy?

£5 could buy a **savings book** for a member of a VSLA, setting them up to start their own small business and become financially independent.

£30 would help a family buy **two Jerrycans** to collect water from the river to carry back to their farm. Jerrycans provide irrigation to crops, especially during the dry season, maintaining food production for the family.

£50 would mean a vulnerable family can purchase a **water storage tank**. Water

can then be stored for a few days rather than travelling to the communal water point, allowing instant access to water for washing, cleaning and cooking.

£100 could help a woman set up her own **small business** with a starter kit; including money to purchase her first few items to sell. This means she could supply local grocery shops or restaurants with vegetables, set up a roadside shop, or buy maize to sell in bigger markets like Bujumbura.

£100 could also help buy a family a **bicycle** meaning easier transport to school, quicker access to medical treatment in emergencies or support carrying produce from farm to market.



How can we support Christian Aid?

Donate via the **red envelopes**, in Downing Place or at the Gt. Shelford service on May 12th

Make a donation at the Christian Aid **lunchtime concert** at Downing Place on May 15th

Donate on-line, using the Downing Place **e-envelope**:

Use the link or scan the QR code:

<https://fundraise.christianaid.org.uk/envelope-2024/christian-aid-week-2024-1>



Christian Aid Week service:

Please come to this year's interdenominational service for Christian Aid Week

When: **Sunday May 12th at 6.30**

Where: at **St. Mary the Virgin Parish Church, Gt. Shelford.**

The service will be led by the Vicar, the **Rev. Dr. Julie Norris**, and the speaker will be **Nick Georgiadis**, Christian Aid's national Director of Fundraising and Supporter Engagement. There will be a cash collection for Christian Aid, so do bring real money if you can. Refreshments, with the chance to meet other Christian Aid supporters, will be on offer after the service in the Centre next door.

Car parking is available, but if you need transport, or if you are able to offer a lift, please contact Sheila Porrer.

Concert in aid of Christian Aid

Jane Bower and Alex Clare-Young will be giving a recital of Words and Music at Downing Place on **Wednesday 15th May** at 1pm as part of the lunchtime concert series.

Our morning service on **Sunday May 19th** will have a Christian Aid theme, and there will be a retiring collection for Christian Aid as the monthly cause.

Thank you all for your support.



PREVIOUS SPECIAL CAUSES AND OTHER DONATIONS

We were able to send Marian Koroma the splendid sum of £3,102.91 for the work of the Sallymay International Preschool in Sierra Leone, our Special Cause for March.. Many people commented on how inspiring they found Marian's presentation during worship on Sunday 17 March, and this was certainly reflected in the very generous donations we received after the service in the Retiring Collection. The sums raised were as follows:

- £1,254.58 Retiring Collection
- £1,495.83 Lunchtime Concerts
- £102.50 Other Donations & Gift Aid
- £250 Contribution from our York Street funds

Thank you to everyone who donated.

AN INSIGHT INTO OUR RECENT JUNIOR CHURCH SESSIONS

In this article we want to share some of the activities we have been doing together with our younger children since the last edition of *Place Matters*.

Sunday March 24th was Palm Sunday. The children distributed crosses in the service during our 'Sharing Together' time, and we continued thinking about Palm Sunday later, in the Hub area. Unfortunately, the internet connection wasn't working well, and we could only watch part of the story on the screen. Luckily, we had our musical instruments which we used to sing 'Sing Hosannah, sing hosannah, sing hosanna to the King of kings' and we looked at a picture of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, in a bible story book for children. The younger children started making the Easter Garden, carefully placing the tomb with lots of little stones around it and a big stone in front of it, whilst the older children made the three crosses out of twigs. We put the Easter Garden in the Hub so that everyone could see it!



Palm Sunday

On Sunday 31st March we celebrated Easter Day with 10 children and young people ranging in age from 1 to 15, with two more babies sleeping in the church! It was lovely to welcome so many children, including five visiting grandchildren of congregation members. Fortunately, as well as the Junior Church leaders, we had several helpers that morning. Two of our visitors had come from Germany and they enjoyed talking to Jona who was helping in the group that morning.

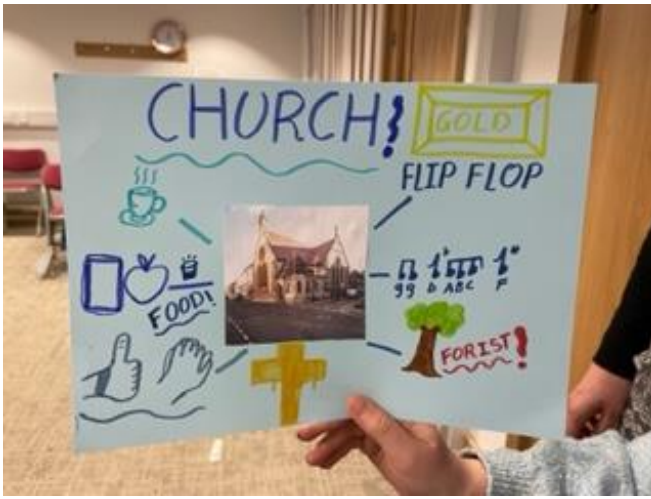
During the service we helped roll back the stone from the tomb in the Easter Garden. When we moved into the Hub we started by singing the action song, 'We have a king who rides a donkey', trying to raise the roof in the chorus as we sang 'Jesus the King is Risen!'. As the morning had remained dry, we were then able to go out into the courtyard garden for an Easter egg hunt, with the older children helping the little ones to find plastic eggs. We later exchanged these for chocolate eggs and Easter bunnies to add to the eggs and oranges distributed in the church. We shared the story of finding the empty tomb and the first realisation that Jesus had risen. The children then chose activities which included making an egg-shaped jigsaw puzzle displaying the words 'He is risen', adding Easter decorations to a tree, and looking at a display of books telling the Easter story. A happy morning was had by all!



Easter Day

On Sunday 7th, in Junior Church we considered the early church. We marvelled at the complete sharing of possessions, and we shared some grapes as we considered the complete commitment of the believers. The children then created posters thinking about how our church reaches out to the local community.

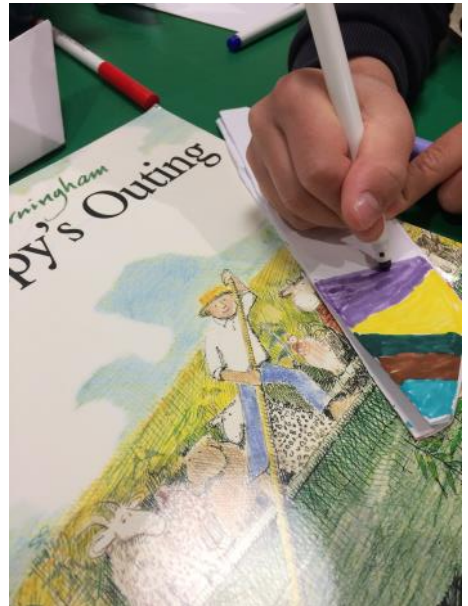
The morning service on Sunday 14th April was held in the Gibson Hall, because there was maintenance work being done in the sanctuary. Liz made us laugh about a mistake in the words on the screen where she was leading a service the previous week. They almost sang about Christmas! A way was found for the correct words to be sung with Hallelujahs for Easter.



7 April

We heard how Peter and John (Acts 3. 12-19) healed a man. People were astonished. Peter said that they had made a big mistake not listening to Jesus. Now they had a way to put that right and live in God's way of love. We thought of mistakes and what might happen next: buying a lively puppy, forgetting someone's birthday. We heard the story of 'Mr Gumpy's Outing'.

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Mi_DV_DWN8M Everyone made a mistake in the boat. Mr Gumpy helped everyone try again. Then we made and decorated paper boats. We aimed to make no mistakes in the coming week, and prayed that we would know how to act if we did.



14 April

*Elza de Bruin, Lorraine Thornton, Daphne Thomas and Jess Uden,
with thanks to all the leaders and helpers for their contributions.*

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES AT DOWNING PLACE

It's so good to see Downing Place buzzing during the week. There are many people who come and feel welcome and comfortable in the Hub. Our church is providing a valuable and precious space where we can share God's love for each of us.



And we are so grateful to those who, from the beginning have offered to help during the week. Wednesdays and Thursdays are the two days where we can engage with those who may not attend on a Sunday but who nevertheless feel they want to be part of our church in other ways.

However, we do need more people to be part of the welcome we offer. If you have a couple of hours to spare on a Wednesday or Thursday, this would help to fill gaps in the rota. It's helpful if you can offer a regular day and time, although you may not be able to offer every week. Volunteers serve drinks and engage in conversation with those who come.. The time slots are 11am-1pm and 1pm-3pm.

As you probably know, on the 3rd Thursday of the month, Gibson's lunches take place. For a modest contribution of £5, an interesting group of people come and enjoy a hot meal. But of course, someone needs to shop for ingredients, and cook the lunch, helped by others, including Turtle Dove. This might be once or twice a year, at most.

Might this be something you could help with? Please let me and Elaine or Jess know if you can help in any way. Thank you.

Pippa Jones





Eastern Synod Roadshows

An informal space to raise questions, share answers, gather ideas and make connections.

Refreshments and resources will be available.

7-February
3pm - 4.30 & 7pm-9pm
Wickford URC

15- May
7.30pm - 9pm
Downing Place, Cambridge

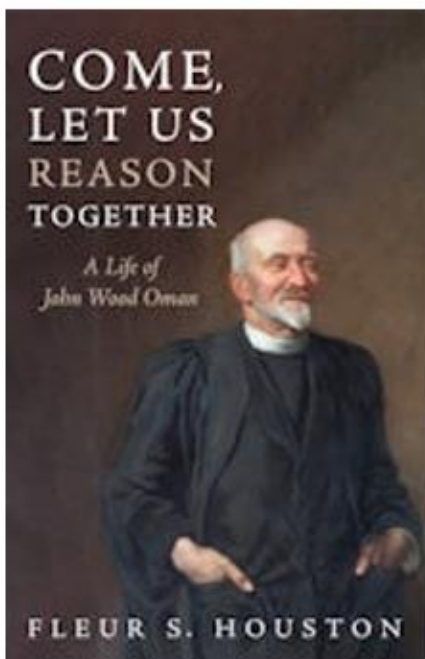
18-September
3pm - 4.30 & 7pm-9pm
Ipswich Road, Norwich

13- November
2pm - 4pm
Epping URC

Synod staff and those with various roles will be on hand to chat about anything and everything, and to offer advice and support.

urceastern.org.uk





BOOK LAUNCH

You are cordially invited to the launch of Fleur Houston's book, *Come Let us Reason Together: A Life of John Wood Oman*, at Westminster College, Cambridge, on 7 May 2024.

The event will begin at 4.30pm with a drinks reception. Professor David Fergusson, Regius Professor of Divinity in the Divinity Faculty of Cambridge University and Dr David Cornick, formerly Principal of Westminster College and Emeritus Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge, will speak. This will be followed by a buffet.

All are welcome, but for catering purposes, registration via Eventbrite would be helpful – <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/book-launch-fleur-houstons-come-let-us-reason-together-tickets-860959381687?aff=oddtcreator>



Supported by Westminster College and the Cheshunt Foundation.



YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN



TUESDAY 14 MAY 6.00PM

AT DOWNING PLACE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
HOSTED BY CAMBRIDGE HINDU FORUM

Meet people from diverse faith
communities in Cambridge and
explore the theme of:

'Giving'



FREE; BOOKING REQUIRED
scan for details and tickets



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!

- 1 May Tobias Campos (tenor)
- 8 May Veronica Henderson (cello) & Elizabeth Mucha (piano)
- 15 May Christian Aid Week Concert
Jane Bower (spoken word) & Alex Clare-Young (clarsach)
- 22 May Olive Murray (soprano) & Christopher Foreman (piano)
- 29 May Nigel Blomiley (cello)

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



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)



MEMBERS PREACHING ELSEWHERE

5 May	Liz Caswell Alex Clare-Young David Cornick Janet Tollington	Holy Trinity, Bottisham Dovercourt Bassingbourn Stetchworth & Cheveley
9 May	Liz Caswell	St James' Lodge (midweek communion)
12 May	Chris Baker Liz Caswell Janet Tollington Nigel Uden	St Ives Stetchworth & Cheveley Buntingford Fulbourn
19 May	Liz Caswell Jo Clare-Young John Proctor David Tatem Janet Tollington Nigel Uden	Whiting Street, Bury St Edmunds Southwold Saffron Walden Bassingbourn Melbourn Queens' College (evensong)
26 May	Chris Baker Janet Bottoms Janet Tollington Nigel Uden	Stetchworth & Cheveley Fulbourn Trinity, Burwell Wesley Church (pulpit exchange) Fulbourn (6pm Holy Communion)



MAY DIARY

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Wed	01-May-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Tobias Campos (tenor)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	02-May-24	Midweek Worship led by Alan Rickard	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 - 4:00am	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
Mon	06-May-24	Bank Holiday - Building Closed	All Day	
Tue	07-May-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	08-May-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Veronica Henderson (cello) & Elizabeth Mucha (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Wed	08-May-24	Elders' Meeting	7:30pm	Zoom
Wed	08-May-24	Solidarity Hub - Acorn the Community Union	7:00pm	The Hub
Thu	09-May-24	Prayer Meeting	10:15am	St Columba's Chapel
Thu	09-May-24	Ascension Day Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Thu	09-May-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sat	11-May-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	12-May-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	12-May-24	Sunday Worship led by Richard Lewney	11:00am	Church
Sun	12-May-24	Solidarity Prayers	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	12-May-24	Solidarity Social Action Group	7:30pm	The Hub
Mon	13-May-24	Officers' Meeting	10:15am	Minister's Room
Mon	13-May-24	DEADLINE for booking and paying for the Gibson Lunch	4:30pm	
Tue	14-May-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Tue	14-May-24	Interfaith Service (see p.27)	6:00pm	Church
Wed	15-May-24	DEADLINE for submitting items for 'Place Matters'		
Wed	15-May-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Christian Aid Week Concert Jane Bower (spoken word) Alex Clare-Young (clarsach)	1:00pm	Church
Wed	15-May-24	Synod Roadshow event (see p.25)	7.30pm- 9.00pm	Church
Thu	16-May-24	Gibson Lunch	12:30pm	Gibson Hall
Thu	16-May-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Thu	16-May-24	Midweek Worship led by the Revd Alex Clare-Young	6:00pm	St Columba's Chapel

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Thu	16-May-24	Pioneer Minister's Steering Group	6:45pm	Rooms 1 & 2
Fri	17-May-24	Meditation Group	5:30pm	St Columba's Chapel
Sat	18-May-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	19-May-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	19-May-24	Pentecost Sunday Worship led by the Revd Nigel Uden followed by a Retiring Collection for Christian Aid	11:00am	Church
Sun	19-May-24	Church Meeting (Reports and Accounts)	12:30pm	Church
Sun	19-May-24	Solidarity Social Drop In	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	19-May-24	Open Table Communion Service	7:00pm	Church and Hub
Tue	21-May-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship join Fulbourn URC for 'The Word Together'	2:30pm	Fulbourn URC
Wed	22-May-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Olive Murray (soprano) & Christopher Foreman (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Wed	22-May-24	Solidarity Hub - Acorn the Community Union	7:00pm	The Hub
Thu	23-May-24	Midweek Worship with Communion led by the Revd David Thompson	1:00pm	Church
Thu	23-May-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	Hub
Sat	25-May-24	Solidarity Hub Trumpington Gathering	4:00pm	tbc
Sat	25-May-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	26-May-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Sun	26-May-24	Trinity Sunday Worship led by the Revd Rose Westwood	11:00am	Church
Sun	26-May-24	Cambridge Early Music present Bach & Telemann: A Meeting of Friends	6:00pm - 7.10pm	Church
Sun	26-May-24	Solidarity Prayers	6:30pm	Hub
Sun	26-May-24	Solidarity Scripture	7:30pm	Hub
Mon	27-May-24	Bank Holiday - Building Closed	All Day	
Tue	28-May-24	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	29-May-24	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Nigel Blomiley (cello)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	30-May-24	Midweek Worship led by Jane Bower	11:00am	Church
Thu	30-May-24	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	Hub
Fri	31-May-24	Meditation Group	5:30pm	St Columba's Chapel
Sat	01-Jun-24	Nightlite	10:00pm - 4:00am	Emmanuel Room
Sun	02-Jun-24	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	02-Jun-24	Sunday Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Sun	02-Jun-24	Solidarity Prayers	6:30pm	The Hub
Sun	02-Jun-24	Open Table/Solidarity Social	7:30pm	The Hub



LECTIONARY FOR MAY

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.

5 May (Easter 6)

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

12 May (Easter 7)

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Psalm 1

1 John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19

19 May (Pentecost)

Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 104:24-34,35b

Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27;16:4b-15

26 May (Trinity Sunday)

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 29

Romans 8:12-17

John 3:1-17

2 June (Trinity 1)

1 Samuel 3:1-10,(11-20)

Psalm 139:1-6,13-18

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Mark 2:23-3:6





Aline Nibogora transporting baked bricks from the brick kiln for her new house.

Credit: Christian Aid/Armstrong Too.

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 June edition to both Tim and Ann by the cut off date of **Wednesday 15 May**.

The June edition will be available from **Sunday 2 June**.