



DOWNING PLACE
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
CAMBRIDGE

PLACE MATTERS



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Cover Photograph by Jess Uden

*Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Elders and Members of
Downing Place United Reformed Church*

FROM THE MINISTER

Looking back, I realise the life of a jobbing parson such as I have been is that of a generalist, a jack of all trades. Of course, over the years I have focussed on some things to the exclusion of others. I suppose that is inevitable, whatever our discipline, our role in life. We can't pick and choose the bits we like, and ignore the rest, even if it's rare for anyone to be good at everything.

That said, there are some important things one ought not to neglect. Next month we will mark Pentecost, when The Church celebrates the Holy Spirit. In this year when Christendom is marking the seventeen hundredth anniversary of the Nicene Creed, we might note that it gives equal weight (if not the same number of words) to the Holy Spirit as to the Father and Son. That creed sums up the Spirit as 'the Lord, the giver of life'. No small role. I am grateful to the colleague who, twenty years ago, said they felt my theology lacked sufficient emphasis upon this third person of the Trinity. It seems I was alright on the Father and the Son, but an adequate Trinitarian perspective would require me to include the Spirit more. Truth to tell, I think he was right; he certainly was with regard to the particular document upon which he was commenting.

It wasn't that I was entirely ignorant of the Spirit. In fact, in the 1980s I had had a modest exposure to the charismatic movement, which lays particular stress upon how in the Spirit God is present and acting in our contemporary world. 'God in the present tense', as one has put it. That charismatic experience had both enhanced my previously minimal awareness that the Spirit can be experienced *and* slightly put me off – not least when I was told that the best way to exercise the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues was to copy the person next to me!

Intellectually, however I have grown more and more convinced that the Christian God sans the Spirit is incompletely understood. The God who is from before all else was, and was made known in the Carpenter of Nazareth, needs a thoroughly up to date embodiment – what another has identified as the Godhead's 'executive function' here and now.

As Downing Place Church enters a new phase of its life and ministry, the person and work of the Spirit might be a matter upon which we all need to redouble our attention. There is so much one could say, but in the Scriptures, there are four functions of the Spirit for which we will do well to pray in the coming days.

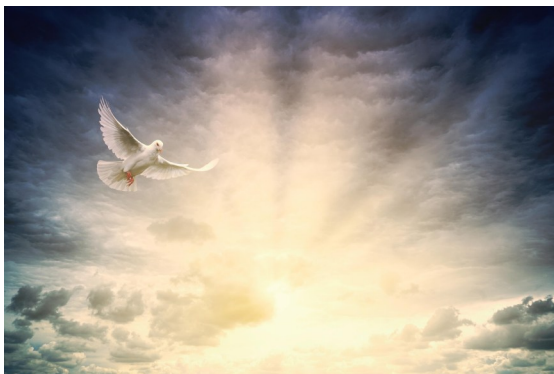
First, in Romans 5.5, St Paul makes the fundamental point that the Spirit's work is to pour the love of God into our hearts. That is the starting point of our discipleship. Not that we loved God, but that God loved us. Nothing we seek to

be as a Christian fellowship is of worth if it does not emerge from trusting that wondrous truth of what the Spirit does.

Secondly, God's love for us irresistibly stirs us into fellowship with each other. And that is the Spirit's work, too. Michael Welker puts it like this: 'The Pentecost event connects intense experiences of individuality with a new experience of community.' (*God the Spirit* 1994) It's as if the Spirit knows our bias is to prefer unfamiliarity and isolation, to hide behind resentment and hurt and selfishness. She, though, inspires us to that community which will work at reconciliation, will not give in to grudge-bearing. Instead, the Spirit seeks to reap in our lives a luscious harvest of her fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Sometimes churches go through seasons of especially needing that work of the Spirit; they never go through times when they don't need that work of the Spirit at all.

The third of the Spirit's ministries to us is the way she arouses us to mission and equips us for it by sending us into the world to make disciples, to care for those in need, and to sustain the Hebrew prophets' work of speaking out against any injustice which treats some more preferentially than others. Members of churches are no less likely to resist the demands of such work than those who aren't. Only as the Spirit arrests our wills and directs our inclinations are we enabled to be the church in mission that God calls us to be.

And the fourth work of the Spirit I want to mention is perhaps the one for which many of us long – and maybe more at the moment than oftentimes before. It's the desire for peace: peace on our innermost being, because there's greyness – or is it a heaviness in the tummy? – that the state of the world creates; peace between the bellicose nations of that world; and peace in the church – ours, and many others as we grapple with the challenges of being authentic followers of Jesus Christ, amidst all the changes that are coming, not least to Downing Place Church. And that peace, too, is the Spirit's gift.



So – to know the love of God, to be a community, to serve God’s mission, and to receive that peace which the world cannot give, how profoundly we need the Holy Spirit in order to be the church. Emphatically, the influence of the third person of the Trinity is not to be neglected.

Facing whatever the future offers and asks, there is little that we need more consistently to seek than that One whom some call the ‘enemy of apathy’, for above all she spurs us to worship God. As for a millennium we have sung to her, so let’s continue to do so now:

Teach us to know the Father, Son,
and thee, of both, to be but one,
that through the ages all along,
this may be our endless song:
Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Only thus can we be the Church. So let it be.

Nigel Uden

CHRIS BAKER - A PROFILE

It feels as if the Church has claimed me from birth. I was born at Exmouth in Devon and was baptised in Glenorchy Congregational Church where my parents were keen members. (The church had been founded by Lady Glenorchy in 1777, hence the name.) My father was employed by the local Gas Works, and during the War there was an underground shelter in the works and I was taken there during air raids. Other people joined us, one of whom was an elderly Salvationist who apparently would sit me on her knee and sing: *‘Safe am I, safe am I in the hollow of His hand.’* And she was right!

Initially I went to a very small school run by two sisters. The basic education was excellent except that there were no sports. Just occasionally we would be taken to a room upstairs and do physical jerks to music! Later I took the entrance exam to Exeter School and passed, so that was to be my next school.



I was taken to Sunday School regularly and well remember the Bible Stamps and the Scripture Exam which Elizabeth Whitehorn mentioned last month. As time went by, I became a Sunday School teacher and in 1955 I entered the 'Teachers' Division 1 Exam. By now I was beginning to wonder if I was being called to the Christian ministry so secretly (and shamefully) I made a little bargain with God. If I did well, I would give further consideration to the idea of a call. He gave me cause to think!

In 1955 three young people were asked to lead a service and I volunteered to preach. The idea was that our minister would check everything beforehand but when we went to see him, he was unwell and his wife would not let us in. So, in at the deep end with no training. I began to take more services and one day one of the deacons knew where I was due to preach and rang up to tell me it was a Communion Service. Was I alright with that? I hesitated and he said I should just 'follow the book'. I vividly remember taking the service with sweat pouring off me. I can imagine some people being horrified at this tale, but I can assure you the heavens did not cave in!

By this time, I had left school and joined the staff of Barclays Bank in Exeter. But then in 1956 I was called up for National Service in the RAF. I served most of my time in a MOD unit perched on the edge of RNAS Culdrose. During my time there I attended one of the local Methodist Churches.

Leaving the RAF I was still hesitant about the call to the ministry so resumed my career with Barclays Bank. But I couldn't hold out for much longer and my church kindly recommended me for training. I then spent four years at Western College in Bristol. One summer I did a two-month student pastorate at Westbury. They were lovely people and it was there that I was introduced to Pilots, the children's organisation of the Congregational Church. Pilots was built around the mission of the church, with particular emphasis on the work of the London Missionary Society and the John Williams line of ships.



At home in Exmouth I met Pat, a young lady who had started coming to our church and in January 1967 I did one of the most sensible things in my life – I asked her to marry me and she agreed.

Leaving College I was called to the Congregational Church in Seven Kings, Ilford. Our time there was very good and I'm sure the members were very forgiving. A couple of years later I was asked to take on the church at Barking as well. It was while we were at Seven Kings that our two daughters were born – Elizabeth and Catherine. And, of course, it was during this time that the United Reformed Church came into being.

From Seven Kings we moved to Trinity Bath. Trinity had been a Presbyterian Church and so it was a bit of a learning curve for both sides, but they were lovely people. Again, a year or two later, the church at Holt was added to the pastorate. Inevitably I served the District in various capacities and it must be admitted that during this time I twice came near to leaving the URC. I suppose the good Lord kept me in place! Trinity united with Argyle and it was time to move on.

Our next church was at Sutton-in-Ashfield. As the church was quite small the plan was that I should also become District Secretary. However, before that happened, I was invited to take part in a course at St. George's House, Windsor. This was a wonderful experience. After a month in the rarified atmosphere of Windsor Castle, it was back to Sutton and the District. Later I swapped the District Secretary's job to become the Training Officer for the northern part of the East Midlands Province.

I was then involved in producing some material on evangelism, officially for the Council for World Mission, but in effect it was mainly URC. I ended up being given all the material to write up, and it was published as 'Mission Pursuit'. Soon after I was given the opportunity to join a group of ten from the URC visiting the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. This was another wonderful experience. While on that trip I heard that John Robinson was giving up as Master Pilot so felt that was something I should consider. It was advertised as a one-day-a-week job which I though was insufficient for a national children's post so I said I would be interested if it was half-time. This was grossly unfair on the other applicants but I was offered the job. With the assistance of the Provincial Pilot Officers, we rewrote all the material and, as we had established a little reprographics group at Sutton-in-Ashfield, we were able to produce it at very low cost.

But it was time to move again and this time we moved to Falmouth & Portscatho, the far western outposts of the URC! The most dramatic thing that happened here was that the church had been raising funds for a better manse. One evening I received a letter from the church Treasurer to say that he had cleaned us out financially and disappeared with over £20,000. There was no money, no books, no records. The church was magnificent. They rallied round and I believe the church was stronger than it had been before.

During our time in Falmouth, we did an exchange with a minister in Eau Claire, Wisconsin which was a wonderful trip.



Left to right: Catherine, Pat, Chris and Elizabeth in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

In March 2003 we retired (at least I think that's what happened) and came to Ely. In retirement I was, for six years, Chaplain to Westminster College which was great, getting to know, and sometimes help, those being trained for future ministry. A real privilege. We found our spiritual home at Emmanuel and then Downing Place. In 2016 Pat became unwell and eventually was discovered to have bowel cancer. She was able to stay at home and she faced the situation with great courage and faith, passing away peacefully in November 2020. We were immensely grateful for the support of Nigel and Pippa at that time. I carry on and am still leading worship in URC and Methodist churches in the area roughly twice a month and when I am not, I will worship either at Ely Methodist Church or come in to Downing Place.



Chris and Pat in August 1997

ELAINE'S COFFEE MORNING

Jane Bower writes

Following the tribute to Elaine Barker in the March Place Matters, readers may enjoy a few photographs of Mrs. B's farewell coffee morning on March 29th. This was extremely well-attended, with a splendid cake made by Liz Barrow, featuring canine companions Riley and Milo, and a superbly hand-crafted basket of primulas. Fine and genuinely appreciative spoken tributes were paid by Nigel and a number of members, and a range of beautifully tasteful and well-deserved gifts was presented - I suffered severe handbag envy, but managed to fight it down. Thank you, Elaine, and as Nigel said - God bless you.

(Photos by Jane Bower and Stephen Thornton)





FROM OUR ECUMENICAL CORRESPONDENT

VI : The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Quakers belong broadly in the ‘radical’ rather than the ‘magisterial’ tradition (see Episode V, in *Place Matters*, February 2025), but question inherited institutions more than other groups in that category. Indeed, some are not entirely comfortable with the label ‘Christian’ at all. But that is clearly the place to start.

England’s political upheavals of the 17th century, particularly after the military coup of 1648 and during Charles II’s exile, created favourable conditions for new religious movements to emerge, allowing those with longer histories, like Independents and Baptists, to meet openly and agree their distinctive principles. This was an opportunity for visionaries to publish their visions and gather a following. Those who foresaw the imminent establishment of Christ’s kingdom on earth could act accordingly, without others holding them back.

In 1652 George Fox made known his vision of ‘a great people to be gathered’. From Swarthmore Hall, where he met with his first adherents, his message went out across the kingdom and soon won a following. The distinctive characteristic of Fox’s ‘Friends’ was that they saw no need for organised liturgical worship, for sacraments or ministers to officiate at them. They recognised no authority of one believer over others: everybody had ‘something of God’ in him or her. So there was no room to formulate in creeds what others must believe. They did, like other Dissenting groups, develop a concept of membership and ways of making group decisions. Like other Dissenters they formed a ‘society’, their worship took place in ‘meetings’ and their buildings were ‘meeting houses’. But, unlike those others later, they never claimed to be, nor to worship in, ‘churches’.



Swarthmore Hall, Ulverston, Cumbria

Early Quakers were strikingly counter-cultural. Simplicity in dress and rejection of fashion kept their clothing habits consistent; men wore hats indoors because no clear biblical word commanded otherwise. They resisted legal requirements to swear oaths since Jesus had said ‘Let your yea be yea’. Of special importance later, they refused to bear arms or enlist in any military force.

Refusal to integrate can either ignite hostility, or generate concessions by the rest of the community. Outspoken Quakers, including Fox, were imprisoned even under the military régime. This failed to halt the movement: in Cambridge, Friends were meeting near Sidney Sussex College from 1659. When 1660 saw constitutional government and England’s law of religion restored, its rules hit Friends particularly hard; new penalties then targeted distinctively Quaker practices. Significantly, the business meetings which emerged in the Restoration era included a ‘Meeting for Sufferings’, a title still used by the standing organ of British Quakerism.

But toleration swung the law the other way. Affirmation was allowed for those who would not swear. Their meetings for worship became lawful if they acknowledged the Trinity and the inspiration of Scripture. As the movement spread overseas, William Penn was able from 1681 to create a ‘safe space’ as proprietor of a new colony in the Americas. Wealthy support was not lacking: land in Jesus Lane was given in 1700 to Friends already using part of it.



The present Friends' Meeting House on Jesus Lane

Challenging wider society did not mean having no rules of their own. For example, Friends were not encouraged to marry outside the community; within it, they eschewed any marriage ceremony beyond a simple declaration made in a meeting for worship. The law requiring almost all others to marry in a parish church after 1753 made an exception for Friends, recognising attempts to change

their practice would be futile and probably serve no good purpose. Quaker marriage was nothing if not respectable; but the conviction that couples marry each other whilst 'We are but witnesses' would later make it easy for Quakers to be among the first to host and affirm the union of same sex couples.

Quakerism in Regency Cambridge entered upon a century-long interval, the meeting house being let for other purposes. But as tolerance increased, the national movement broadened its reputation for social concern: opponents of slavery, prison reform campaigner Elizabeth Fry and the model employers Rowntree and Cadbury all made their names in this period. Removal of religious tests for Cambridge graduation encouraged Jesus Lane Meeting to reopen in 1884: by then Quakerism had particular appeal for progressive thinkers. The same year saw publication of *A Reasonable Faith*, often considered the first landmark in the British movement's shift from evangelical to liberal. By the early twentieth century, in the words of one Quaker historian, a significant number believed 'the key to Quakerism was not the limiting word of Scripture but the defining Light of Christ'. This conviction was admittedly not shared across the whole movement: notable differences can now be seen between British Friends and Quakers elsewhere. The fact that neither creeds nor the Bible are necessary foundations for Quaker belief explains why some conservative Christians doubt whether Quakers share the same religion as themselves.

The World Wars brought military conscription, with only limited recognition of conscientious objection. The Quaker peace testimony came into its own, leading many Friends to decline armed service; but a number redeemed themselves in the public mind by exemplary service in non-combatant work. 1947's Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Society.

Visiting Jesus Lane today, one finds ground floor space for catering and fellowship, with evidence of Cambridge Quakers' many causes and interests. Upstairs in the Meeting Room, Friends and visitors gather at their own pace to listen to the Spirit. 'Ministry' is the Quaker term for the brief contribution or reflection anybody can voice during the hour or half-hour of quiet. Chairs encircle a central table on which the Bible, *Quaker Faith and Practice* and one or two other sources lie for reference; but the Meeting is not a place for learned talks or debate.

A general handshake marks the close of worship, beginning with two of the Elders, who also exercise a pastoral function in the community. Rounding matters off, the Clerk (who also holds the Meeting's business together) gives any notices, and what seems like a genuine welcome to newcomers.

Augur Pearce

THE NICENE CREED

Editor: “I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible”. So begins the text of the Nicene Creed. I learned those words from childhood, as I spoke them from the choir stalls in three parish churches around the East End of London. So when I learned that we are celebrating their 1700th anniversary this year, I wanted to mark the event in this magazine. Many readers will have seen David Thompson’s account, in last month’s edition, of the events leading to the first ecumenical council, held at Nicaea in 325AD, convened by the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine. As David explained, the greatest success achieved at the Council was the agreement by 218 bishops of a form of words on the nature of Christ: the Nicene Creed. My next move was to invite Robert Pope to help us understand what is it that the Nicene Creed asserts, and what it means. So now – please read on ...

What we know as the Nicene Creed confesses two important things about Jesus: he is ‘Lord’ and he is ‘Saviour’. What enables him to be Lord and Saviour, according to the Creed, reflects theological debates which occurred in the fourth-century church.

While there is *one* God, in the first clause associated with the Father who is the Creator (‘maker of heaven and earth’), there is also ‘one Lord Jesus Christ’ who is ‘the only Son of God’. The Creed does not suggest that the Son is *another* God, but the same God as the Father. He really is God (‘true God from true God’) and is of the same ‘being’, ‘essence’ or ‘substance’ as the Father (*homoousion* – ‘consubstantial’). This is a way of saying that the Son is divine in the same way that the Father is divine. The Son shared in the Father’s act of creation (‘through him all things were made’). According to the Creed, then, Jesus is God in a way that means he has a distinct personality from the Father (he is ‘Son’ rather than ‘Father’), but not in a way that makes them two gods. There remains one God who is, and always has been, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a baffling assertion, which borders on the incomprehensible and therefore maintains the essential mystery of God. But it is a necessary assertion in order to affirm Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection confirmed to the early Christians that he was *Lord*, a term which rightly is confined to God. To call Jesus Lord is to hail him as God. But Lord is a troubling word for some today. When speaking of Jesus, we understand his lordship in the light of what we know about him: his humility, his sense of service, his teaching about the poor and the first being last, his willingness to die on a cross. These things tell us something about God’s

priorities and challenge us in our living in a world where priorities seem to be very different.

As well as Lord, Jesus is also *Saviour*. This could be understood in many ways, but at Nicaea it was upheld that it is only as God and as a human that Jesus could bring salvation to the world. The Creed declares that it is Christ as pre-existing Son of God who became human (*incarnate*) ‘for us and for our salvation’. While other opinions existed, the majority view at Nicaea was the more scandalous one that God had become a human being, born of a woman and entering the world as a baby, like all other human beings. Only one who is fully God can properly be called Lord; only one who is fully God and also fully human could save the human race.

The Creed does not say all that there is to say, nor did its circulation bring an end to debate and controversy in the early church. It says nothing explicit about God’s love, for example, nor does it tell us much about what Jesus saves us from (apart from the reference to ‘baptism for the forgiveness of sins’, which still does not explain what ‘sin’ is). Furthermore, while the Creed maintains that the Son is of the same ‘being’ as the Father, the claim that the Son is ‘begotten’ (even if eternally) and the Spirit ‘proceeds’ led to questions about whether the three persons of the Trinity are co-equal and could be used to raise questions about whether the three persons of the Trinity are co-eternal.

Nevertheless, as an affirmation that God is the creator of everything, that God enters the creation in search of the lost, and that God does not leave us on our own, the Creed offers comfort for the present and hope for the future. As such it captures the essence of the Christian good news.

Robert Pope



What looks like "the Last Supper of Jesus Christ and his Apostles" is actually a painting depicting "Roman Emperor Constantine I and bishops of Rome at the First Council of Nicea in 325 AD." Image via Wikimedia Commons

Ian de Massini, Joint Director of Music for Downing Place URC, writes:

The morning service at Downing Place URC on May 18th 2025 will take the Nicene Creed¹ as its theme, marking the meeting of the First Council of Nicaea precisely 1,700 year ago, in CEE 325. The instrumental music selected to embellish that act of worship will recognise and celebrate that event, and the Nicene Creed itself. As far as we know, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) only ever set the Nicene Creed to music once during his lifetime. He placed his multi-movement, musical setting of the Nicene Creed at the very centre of his great *Mass in B minor*, BWV 232, which he completed in 1749, less than a year before his death. Bach's concern for mathematical rigour and symmetrical perfection in all of his major compositions is revealed in his division of the Nicene Creed's lengthy text into three principal sections:



1. Christ's Incarnation; 2. Christ's Crucifixion; 3. Christ's Resurrection.

As part of the May 18th morning service, there will be performed an excerpt from each of these three sections, namely the *Et incarnatus est*, the *Crucifixus*, and concluded with the *Et resurrexit*, all specially arranged for performance on the Downing Place Church's unique Digital Organ, scored for two musicians playing either in the form of an Organ & Piano duet, or with both players seated at the same Organ.

The service will also include the upbeat hymn entitled *Confessing the faith*, the words of which were written by Rev'd Ken Rathje, who was attached to Downing Place Church during 2021, whilst the music was later composed jointly by the church's two Directors of Music.

¹ The Nicene Creed has been the topic of *Place Matters* articles by David Thompson (April 2025 issue) and Robert Pope (this issue).

**HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS,
17 DECEMBER 1936 – 21 APRIL 2025**

This tribute to the later Pope Francis was compiled jointly by David Thompson and Tim Rowland. It draws on a reflection prepared by the URC and published on its website.



Image: www.quirinale.it

Downing Place URC, along with Christians everywhere, mourns the death of His Holiness Pope Francis on 21st April 2025.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Pope in March 2013, following the abdication of Benedict XVI. All who are called to offices of leadership and oversight in the Church realise how demanding these roles can be; none can be more demanding than that of the Bishop of Rome.

Within the limitations and expectations of the Papal office, Francis was an agent of change who sat lightly on inherited traditions and pomp. Living a simple lifestyle meant, for Francis, rejecting a move into the Papal apartments and remaining in a small suite in the Vatican guesthouse, taking his meals with other guests.

He oversaw the updating of the constitution for the Roman Curia (the Vatican civil service) so that it was orientated towards service and mission; it is supposed to be a template for every diocesan curia. Francis saw his ministry, primarily, as being one who called the Church to be missionary. In a speech before his election, Francis stated: “When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelise, she becomes self-referential and sick”. He also spoke of Jesus knocking on the door, from within the Church, seeking to be let out into the world.

Francis embarked on a bold programme of reform, convening more regularly the Synod of Bishops established by Paul VI following the Second Vatican Council. This was a pope who understood, and embodied, the interconnected nature of all

humanity, and the strong familial bonds between Christians. His vision would be familiar to Reformed Christians, with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit working within a synodical process.

He yearned for a shared discernment process which included laity - both men and women. Francis appointed more women to the higher rungs of the Roman Curia, although not at the speed needed to ensure balance between the sexes. He did, however, include more women than ever before in Synods, ensuring that they had prominent positions within them.

His stance on same-sex marriage was complex, and evolving. While he upheld the Catholic Church's traditional teaching that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, he also advocated compassion and inclusion. When asked about a gay priest, he famously shrugged his shoulders and said: "Who am I to judge?" In 2023, he approved blessings for same-sex couples, whilst maintaining that these blessings should not be confused with the sacrament of marriage.

Francis was determined to bring out the strong relational bonds between religious traditions and within humanity itself. He referred to Muslims as "our siblings" and went to great lengths to improve Christian-Muslim relations, visiting the United Arab Emirates in 2019 and Iraq in 2021. The global significance of Francis' ministry was seen most clearly in his two environmental encyclicals, in which he repurposed the heritage of Christianity as a faith seeking profound and nourishing interaction with fellow creatures.

With Francis, big broad-stroke arguments for environmental justice belonged with the simple appreciation of accessible beauty: encouraging grace at meals, and wildflowers in churches, that "those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty."

With Donald Trump's return to the Presidency of the USA, Pope Francis became alarmed at the rhetoric and actions against migrants. In February 2025 he wrote to the US Catholic Bishops, reminding them of the migration of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt in search of a better future, and the Holy Family's flight into Egypt to escape terror. He commended migrants to Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose feast day is marked by special prayers and celebrations among immigrant communities.

Above all, Francis was a pastoral pope, emphasising the mercy of God and the need to change our ways to save the planet. His ministry was remarkable. From his simple "good evening" to the crowds on the evening of his election to the warmth that radiated from him, he caught the imagination of the world. Not since John XXIII has the non-Catholic world felt such warmth towards a Pope.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

MONTHLY SPECIAL CAUSE FOR MAY

Christian Aid is almost too well known to need an introduction, but the work it is doing is more urgently needed than it has ever been, as governments cut their overseas aid spending, and as conflict, climate change and natural disasters seem to happen more and more often. Those who suffer most are the poorest and the most vulnerable, exposed to poverty, hunger and disease. **Christian Aid** gives us a way to support those most at risk, by offering us the privilege of **giving, acting and praying** to further its work.

This year's **Christian Aid Week** appeal highlights Guatemala and the challenges faced by its farmers like Aurelia, struggling with the effects of climate change. For more about this, and about all the other work **Christian Aid** is doing, do explore the website, which is full of information, and come along to the special eightieth anniversary service on May 18th – details below.



Aurelia with grandchildren, father and daughter-in-law.

Credit: A.Sheppey/Christian Aid

Reminder – dates for your diary

Sunday 11th May – **Christian Aid Week** begins. Retiring collection in aid of Christian Aid.

Wednesday 14th May – **Lunchtime concert** by Jane Bower, Alan Revill and Simeon Walker: The Power of Hope, in aid of **Christian Aid**.

Sunday 18th May, **Eightieth birthday service** for **Christian Aid** at Great St. Mary's, 2.30 pm. Preacher Dr. Rowan Williams. Drinks reception afterwards.

Saturday 26th July – **Christian Aid thank you tea** for all supporters at St Mark's, Newnham. More details in June's Place Matters.

Christian Aid:

- brings support wherever it is needed, to all communities, of any faith or none
- steps in swiftly when disaster strikes – whether man-made or natural
- works long term to set up programmes rooted in local communities
- works with local partners on the ground, who are best placed to know the real needs
- aims to help people become self- sufficient, not just relying on further funding
- operates in dozens of countries throughout the world
- works to combat the effects of climate change
- fights against poverty and the causes of poverty
- works together with aid organisations from other faiths, such as Islamic Aid
- is non-political, its aims are purely humanitarian
- is supported by British Churches of many different denominations
- seeks to be a prophetic voice, throwing a spotlight on what is wrong and what to do about it
- develops advocacy programmes, here and abroad, to train people to make their case
- has been doing all of this and more for **EIGHTY YEARS**

Ways of Giving to Christian Aid, our May special cause

- Via the Downing Place e-envelope, click on [Downing Place envelope - Christian Aid Fundraise](#)
- Via the red envelopes, available in Church, by cash or cheque. Don't forget to fill in the gift aid slip if you can
- Monthly retiring collection on Sunday May 11th, by cash, cheque or card.
- At the lunchtime concerts throughout the month.
- By direct donation to Christian Aid, via their website. If you would like to link your donation to Downing Place Church, quote the Church's OR number – OR 48907 – when prompted. *(However, you cannot gift-aid a donation which is linked to a Church, as this is deemed to come from a fundraising activity)*
- Call **020 7523 2269** to donate over the phone
- Send postal donations (cheques) to: Christian Aid, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London, SE1 7RL
- Click on the QR code.



PREVIOUS SPECIAL CAUSES AND DONATIONS



March's Special Cause in aid of Medical Aid for Palestinians raised a total of £2,284.67 as follows:

Lunchtime Concerts	£1,272.53
Retiring Collection	£799.40
Other Donations	£91.18
Gift Aid	£21.56
York Street Contribution	£100



Our emergency collections for the DEC Myanmar Appeal raised a total of £1,290 including Gift Aid.

Commitment
for Life

Suzanne Pearson writes

We are most grateful for your congregation's generous donation of £11,462.92 received by bank transfer on 6th January 2025, to Commitment for Life. Your continued generosity towards our support for Christian Aid and Global Justice Now is much appreciated.

Please find below a short message from Patrick Watt, Chief Executive Officer for Christian Aid:

“Thank you so much for all of your dedicated support for Commitment for Life. Ongoing partnerships like Commitment for Life deepen our relationships with those across the world and challenge us to keep justice and peace at the centre of our Christian life. Together we are part of the transformation of God's kingdom and seeing change happen.”

Your contributions make an enormous and practical difference to our partner communities. Your prayers, activism & generosity are a wonderful demonstration of 'life giving faith, defiant hope and generous love'.

NEWS FROM PEMBROKE COLLEGE

We are very grateful to Pembroke for allowing us to reproduce their recent press release and photographs in 'Place Matters'

Phase 1 of the Mill Lane site won two awards at last night's Cambridge Forum for the Construction Industry Awards: Best Refurbishment over £3 million and Craftsmanship. The scheme also received a Highly Commended in the David Mackay Award for Engineering and Sustainability category, as did Cocksedge Building Contractors Limited in the Contractors Award category.

We are delighted that the hard work and skills of everyone at Haworth Tompkins, Bidwells, Gleeds, Price & Myers, Max Fordham LLP, Joel Gustafsson, Tom Stuart-Smith Studio, Charcoal Blue, WSP, Turley, Kellenberger –White, Alison Turnbull and Cocksedge on this monumental project have been recognised with these well-deserved awards.

To quote the judges: 'The project needed to apply a vast range of craft skills due to its size, complexity and multi-faceted nature. The Mill Lane complex presented huge challenges, and we were awed and impressed by the quality, detailing, diversity and beauty of what has been created. '



View across Chiu Court across to the foyer, with the tower of the Auditorium behind it.



Looking down towards the Trumpington Street end of the Foyer. Pale oak floors and ceilings, and columns. To the left run long windows. To the right is the cleaned stone wall of the Auditorium.



Looking across the Auditorium from back left to front right. Pale oak floor, cleaned stone walls, arches and columns. Green chairs are in rows in the main body of the space. A screen hangs above the stage.

AN INSIGHT INTO OUR RECENT JUNIOR CHURCH SESSIONS

On the 23rd March, we delved into the parable of the fig tree which needed a second chance to bear fruit. To illustrate this, we had fun seeing how many large grapes we could hold in one hand. We managed about 11 grapes before they started tumbling everywhere! However, when given a second chance, this time with dried grapes (raisins!), we could hold many more in our hands. This activity reminded us how wonderful it feels to be given a second chance and how generous we can be in offering second chances to others. We listened to the story, and then managed to recount several facts about it as we played “true or false?”:

- The parable is about an old fig tree
- The fig tree grew in a vineyard
- The fig tree had gone for three years without giving any fruit
- The gardener asked the Master to give the tree a second chance.

Afterwards, we got creative with some crafts; painting crosses that will make great decorations for Easter.

The next Sunday, the last one in March, we were thinking about how the prodigal son had been welcomed back home by his father. As we walked from the church to our room, we looked at the ‘Welcome’ sign in the Hub, we remembered that we had come in through the ‘Welcome Area’ and that Pippa had *welcomed* everyone at the start of the service. We also thought about how Elaine used to give us a friendly *welcome* on Sundays mornings, and thought about all the things she did to get the church ready for us. We enjoyed seeing a picture of baby Mabel and looked forward to *welcoming* her soon. As we acted out the story of the prodigal son, we thought about things that help make someone feel welcome. By happy chance there were balloons left from Elaine’s retirement party the day before, so the celebration at the end of the story got into full swing. The best party game was seeing what we could lift using a balloon.



The following Sunday, 6th April, we began to explore the Easter story, talking about ways in which we can show our appreciation to those who help us and make our lives better. Suggestions included saying thank you, sending a card or a message, buying a gift, giving a round of applause or doing something to help them in return. We heard the story of how Mary poured special perfume on Jesus' feet to express her love for Him. and that this happened shortly before the events of Holy Week. Using visual aids we began to put together a timeline of what happened leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection. This led us into creating an Easter Garden to display in church during the coming weeks.



Palm Sunday saw us thinking about the journey Jesus made into Jerusalem on a donkey, through crowds of people cheering and waving palm leaves. We talked about some unexpected heroes in films and books we liked, who were like the donkey who found itself such an important part of the story as Jesus travelled into Jerusalem.



Elza de Bruin, Lorraine Thornton and Jess Uden, with thanks to all the leaders and helpers for their contributions to the work of Junior Church.

NIGEL'S LEAVING PARTY

12 JULY 2.30PM ONWARDS

Dear All,

As you know, we will be holding our farewell to Nigel before his retirement at the end of July, on July 12th. It begins at 14.30 with a service of thanksgiving.

Then there will be tea, cake (Liz's special) and speeches. After a short interval an early supper will be served from 17.30 and to round off the day an evening of light entertainment. We need to finish by 20.15 to allow people to get the last P&R bus.

This will be a large gathering, with many coming from afar to give thanks and to wish Nigel well in his retirement.

We will need **lots** of help from members and friends.

The planning group includes those thinking about chairs, tables and furniture moving. There will be others preparing the supper. We'll need welcomers and those ready to notice when people need help in any way..

So, in fact we will need many of you to be prepared to help please.

Liz Barrow and Sheila Strachan will be planning the meal. They will need people to chop vegetables for the meal in the morning. Three people at 9am and three at 11am please. Help will be needed to serve the supper, probably 4 in addition to the cooks. Could all those attending from Downing Place bring some cake to serve as dessert after the meal? Some gluten/dairy free options would be welcome. It doesn't need to be homemade.

Margaret Thompson is coordinating the welcome and will need 2 in the welcome area and 2 by the Hub doors. We will need floaters to help direct folk too.

David Thomas and David Bush will be in charge of setting up the church for the service, and the evening entertainment and the Gibson Hall and Hub for the meal. They will need at least 4 strong people at various points in the day to move furniture. So up to 10 people could offer help with this please.



Finally music matters. The choir will be singing in the service and during the evening entertainment. Many members sing beautifully, but don't normally sing in the choir. Please think about whether you would like to sing on this special day. In the service we will be singing an anthem that Nigel has requested, which is "Greater Love hath no man", by John Ireland. We need a large, confident choir and there will be rehearsals on 29th June and 6th July after the service. Then during the evening entertainment, we intend to sing again. Please let me and Mark know whether you are intending to sing.

More information will arrive at a later date.

Thank you in anticipation. Pippa



A CHARITY FUND-RAISING PIANO RECITAL IN YOUR HOME!

by Ian de Massini

I was recently asked by a neighbour to give a relaxed, informal 60-minute piano recital in that person's home, as a surprise gift from the neighbour to his wife, who was marking her 60th birthday that very day. The audience comprised friends, work colleagues, and other neighbours, and a voluntary retiring collection was taken, in aid of the East Anglian Children's Hospice (E.A.C.H.), raising several hundred pounds: a very successful enterprise, all round.



Later, it occurred to me that I could offer something similar to others - members and friends of Downing Place. I'd be pleased to give a similar recital, completely free of charge, to anyone who would like to host a similar event, and for any charity of the host's choice.

It doesn't need to be a grand piano. Actually, any piano will do!" The music will be drawn from seven countries – Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Russia, and North America – spanning over 300 years of musical history, from Bach to Gershwin. I might well write a new piano piece specially for the event!

If you might like to host such an event, please contact me directly via ian@downingplaceurc.org.

NAVIGATING DEMENTIA

An information sharing event for those living with dementia and their carers

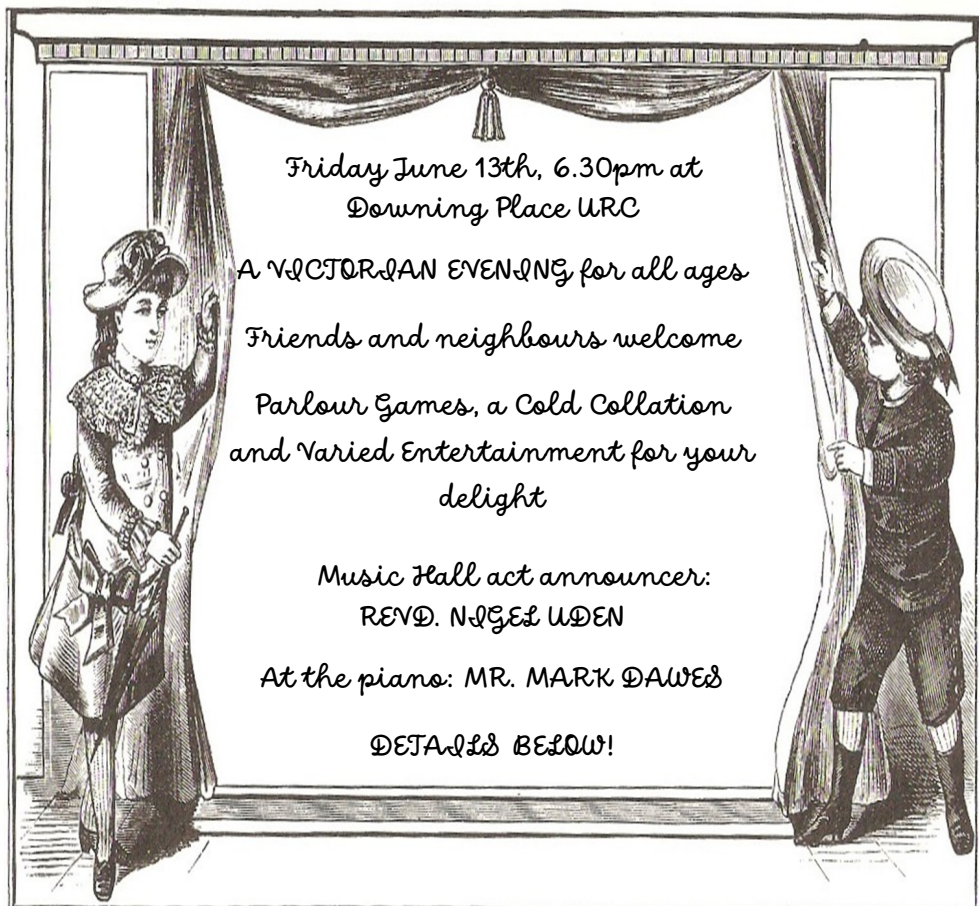
Tuesday 20th May, 10.30am - 1.30pm
Downing Place United Reformed Church,
Cambridge, CB2 3EL

Whether you're living with Dementia or are supporting someone who is, this free event is designed to help you find the information and resources you need.

There will be stalls with representatives from healthcare services, leading Dementia charities, and local organisations and businesses who support those living with the condition and their carers.

There is no need to book, please feel free to drop in whenever suits you. If you would like any more information, please contact Jess Uden, Community Engagement Coordinator, Downing Place URC: jess@downingplaceurc.org





The Social Events Team is organising the above event for all those who visit or attend Downing Place, and their friends – children welcome. With Nigel wielding his gavel and Mark pounding the ivories, we invite you to come along and help to create an authentic atmosphere of yesteryear!

Here's how:

SIGN UP Please sign up on the list in the office. There is a space to tick if you are able to help tidy up the sanctuary afterwards. (Our aim is to have no washing up.)

FOOD To make things as easy as possible, the food will be on a bring-and-share basis, buffet style. We ask that you bring a plateful of small finger food, such as sandwiches, tarts, pies, small buns, fancies or biscuits. If you would like some simple and genuine Victorian ideas, please ask Jane Bower, or search online, or refer to Mrs. Beeton. If you have a plate in keeping with the times, and can bring

your food on that, even better – but don't worry if not! Cold drinks will be provided (and possibly wine – watch this space).

CLOTHING You are welcome whatever you wear, but we are aiming for a Victorian 'feel' without any pressure to go to any trouble. Of course, if you own something really authentic - top hat, tail coat, bustle, enormous fancy hat – now is your chance to wear it, and Dickens characters and chimney sweeps welcome! But simple ideas might be:

Long/ish dress, or skirt and long-sleeved blouse, shawl, perhaps a brooch at the neck. Suit, shirt and tie/bow tie. Ideas for children: dresses, socks and shawls, mob caps/bonnets, knee-length shorts, or trousers tucked in to long socks, cap.

ENTERTAINMENT If you can provide a SHORT piece of suitably Victorian style entertainment, humorous or serious, please contact Jane Bower with your idea. Instruments, songs, readings, recitations, magic tricks, dance, jokes ...

Please help to make this social evening go with a ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay. Any queries, please contact me.

Thank you,

Jane Bower

HAZEL SANDERSON WRITES

Dear friends

I will to be taking part in the 'Star shine' night walk on Saturday 21st June to help raise money for the Arthur Rank Hospice charity. This is a yearly event, and I have walked for the last 3 years, one year with Alex Clare-Young and others from Solidarity Hub. Star Shine Night Walk is a special way to remember and celebrate the lives of loved ones. I will be taking part and walking the 5 mile route under the stars to help raise money for this amazing charity. Please sponsor me to motivate me along the walk and help someone living with a life limiting illness. Thank you.

Here's the link to my fundraising page:

<https://arhc.enthuse.com/pf/hazel-sanderson-889c3>

Hazel Sanderson



THE ART OF HOPE

for Christian Aid Week

Wednesday 14th May, 1pm

Downing Place United Reformed Church

A journey of trust and hope through live on-screen art techniques, words and music. Jane Bower and Alan Revill taught art to total beginners of age 4 to adult over four decades, specialising in those who felt they had no confidence. Simeon Walker's tender, intimate music receives regular broadcasts on Radio 3, taking us on gentle, introspective journeys of stillness, beauty and meaning.

This concert explores what is possible with hope and belief.



LUNCHTIME CONCERTS
MONDAYS AND WEDNESDAYS AT 1PM

Free Lunchtime Concerts with a retiring collection shared between Church funds and our monthly Special Cause. Booking is not necessary.

Monday 5 May
NO LUNCHTIME CONCERT - BANK HOLIDAY

Wednesday 7 May
Joanna Lam (piano)

Monday 12 May
Zhimiao Geng & Phoebe Liu (piano)

Wednesday 14 May
Christian Aid Week Concert with Simeon Walker (piano),
Jane Bower & Alan Revill (live illustrations and readings)

Monday 19 May
Dylan Latham (violin) & Mihaly Gyorfı (piano)

Wednesday 21 May
Adrian Oldland (piano)

Monday 26 May
NO LUNCHTIME CONCERT - BANK HOLIDAY

Wednesday 28 May
Titika Maragoula (soprano) & Richard Carr (piano)

Refreshments are available before and after each concert.

Full information about each concert including the programme is available
on our website

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

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN

Interfaith
Connection
Cambridge

ON TUESDAY 20 MAY 6.00PM
ON THE WOOLF INSTITUTE LAWN FOR AN:

'Interfaith picnic'

BRING AND SHARE VEGETARIAN FOOD
AND MEET PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE FAITH
COMMUNITIES IN CAMBRIDGE

FREE EVENT
SCAN TO REGISTER



 **WOOLF**
INSTITUTE

*Turn left through the gates of Westminster College, and then at the end of the College building
bear right, between it and The Woolf Institute*



*By Woolf Institute123 - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=64039995>*

MAY DIARY

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Thu	01-May-25	Midweek Worship led by Dr Simone Maghenzani	11:00am	Church
Thu	01-May-25	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Thu	01-May-25	Cambridge Voices Open Rehearsal	7:00pm	Church
Fri	02-May-25	Meditation Group	5:30pm	Emmanuel Room
Sun	04-May-25	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	04-May-25	Sunday Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Sun	04-May-25	Open Table Social	7:00pm	The Hub
<i>Mon</i>	<i>05-May-25</i>	<i>No Monday Lunchtime Concert - Bank Holiday</i>	<i>1:00pm</i>	<i>Church</i>
Tue	06-May-25	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Tue	06-May-25	Elders' Meeting	7.30pm	Zoom
Wed	07-May-25	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Joanna Lam (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	08-May-25	Prayer Meeting	10:15am	St Columba's Chapel
Thu	08-May-25	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Thu	08-May-25	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sun	11-May-25	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	11-May-25	Sunday Worship led by Dr Augur Pearce followed by a retiring collection for Christian Aid	11:00am	Church
Sun	11-May-25	Solidarity Hub	2:00pm	TBC

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Mon	12-May-25	Officers' Meeting	10:15am	Minister's Office
Mon	12-May-25	Monday Lunchtime Concert - Zhimiao Geng & Phoebe Liu (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Mon	12-May-25	DEADLINE for booking and paying for the Gibson Lunch	4:00pm	
Mon	12-May-25	Elders' Meeting	7:30pm	Zoom
Tue	13-May-25	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	14-May-25	Christian Aid Week Concert - Simeon Walker, Jane Bower and Alan Revill (see p.32)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	15-May-25	Midweek Worship led by the Revd Deborah McVey	11:00am	Church
Thu	15-May-25	Gibson Lunch	12:30pm	Gibson Hall
Thu	15-May-25	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Fri	16-May-25	Meditation Group	5:30pm	Emmanuel Room
Fri	16-May-25	Alison Binney - Book Launch (see April's 'Place Matters' and weekly notices)	6:30pm	Gibson Hall & Hub
Sun	18-May-25	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	18-May-25	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Sun	18-May-25	Church Meeting - Reports and Accounts	12:30pm	Church
Sun	18-May-25	Open Table Communion Service	7:00pm	Church
Mon	19-May-25	Monday Lunchtime Concert - Dylan Latham (violin) and Mihaly Gyorfi (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Tue	20-May-25	Navigating Dementia (see p.29)	10:30am-1:30pm	Church

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Tue	20-May-25	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	21-May-25	DEADLINE for submitting items for June's <i>Place Matters</i>		
Wed	21-May-25	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Adrian Oldland (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	22-May-25	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd John Proctor	11:00am	Emmanuel Room
Thu	22-May-25	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sun	25-May-25	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	25-May-25	Sunday Worship led by the Revd Nigel Uden. Preacher: Tara Qu	11:00am	Church
Sun	25-May-25	Solidarity Hub	7:00pm	The Hub
Mon	26-May-25	<i>No Monday Lunchtime Concert - Bank Holiday</i>		
Tue	27-May-25	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2:30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	28-May-25	Wednesday Lunchtime Concert - Titika Maragoula (soprano) and Richard Carr (piano)	1:00pm	Church
Thu	29-May-25	Ascension Day Worship led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Thu	29-May-25	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Fri	30-May-25	Meditation Group	5:30pm	St Columba's Chapel
Sun	01-Jun-25	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Church
Sun	01-Jun-25	Sunday Worship with Holy Communion led by the Revd Nigel Uden	11:00am	Church
Sun	01-Jun-25	Open Table Social	7:00pm	Zoom

MEMBERS PREACHING ELSEWHERE

4 May	Chris Baker	St Ives
	Liz Caswell	Clare
	Janet Tollington	Stetchworth & Cheveley
11 May	Chris Baker	Fenstanton
	Penny Flynn	Buntingford
	Nigel Uden	Fulbourn URC
18 May	David Cornick	Lion Walk, Colchester
	Penny Flynn	Bassingbourn
	Janet Tollington	Thaxted
25 May	Liz Caswell	Melbourn
	Deborah McVey	St Luke's LEP Cambridge
	Janet Tollington	Fulbourn (am)
	Nigel Uden	Fulbourn (pm)

NOTICES

Thursday June 5th at 12.15pm Robert Colbert from the Alzheimers society will be coming to Downing Place to give his talk on Dementia Awareness. There will be time for questions at the end. It will last up to an hour. Please let Jess know if you intend coming. We will probably meet in an upstairs room and I hope there will be room for around 12-15 people. Pippa

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.

4 May (Easter 3)

Acts 9:1-6, (7-20)

Psalm 30

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

11 May (Easter 4)

Acts 9:36-43

Psalm 23

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:22-30

18 May (Easter 5)

Acts 11:1-18

Psalm 148

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13:31-35

25 May (Easter 6)

Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10,22-22:5

John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9

1 June (Easter 7)

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

John 17:20-26



Photograph by Stillvision photography



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 21 May**.

The May edition will be available from **Sunday 1 June**