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PLACE MATTERS



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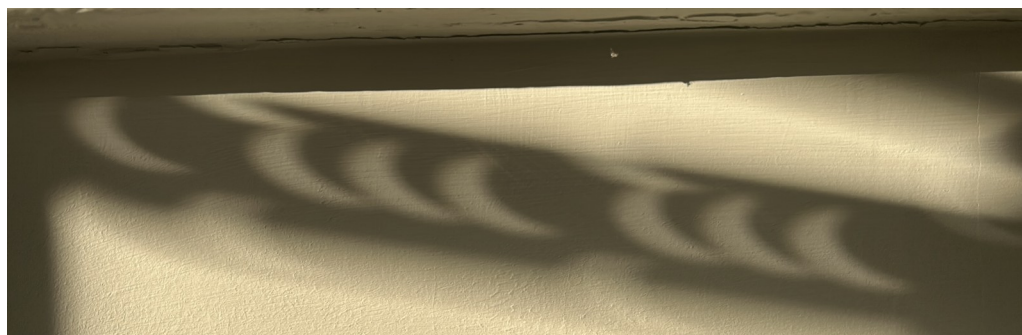
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*Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of
the Elders and Members of Downing Place United Reformed Church*

Images on front and back covers, and below taken by Jess Uden



Eclipse

LETTER FROM A MEMBER – ELIZABETH WHITEHORN

Editor: with Downing Place URC 'in vacancy', I am grateful to those church members, lay and ordained, who agreed to my request that they write something for readers in Place Matters, much as our Minister had until his retirement last year. This month it's Elizabeth.

'Have you talked to God about it?' This question was put to me on a number of occasions by a wise older Christian whom I used to know, and it has remained with me. My instinctive reaction was often, 'Yes, of course I have!' but then I might realise that asking God to help in a particular situation wasn't necessarily the same as talking to God about it; while sending an 'arrow' prayer for God's help was appropriate in a crisis, more often what was needed was time spent deliberately considering the matter in God's presence and, more importantly, letting God speak to me in it and through it.

In the Bible, we read of many characters who encountered God, sometimes in very dramatic ways. For example, in a recent Sunday morning service we focused on Jacob wrestling with God through the night (Genesis 32:22-32). Elijah, one of the great characters in the Old Testament, found himself engaging in conversation with God in the wilderness. At first Elijah expressed his strong feelings and fears, and then had an overwhelming experience of God in 'a sound of sheer silence'. Then he was able to hear God speaking to him about his next mission (1 Kings 19). In the New Testament, we might think of Saul, the persecutor of Christians, who had a life-changing experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and became the apostle Paul. He then spent 'several days' talking to the Christian disciples in Damascus before beginning his own new ministry. In the Gospels (e.g. Matthew 14:13), we read that even Jesus needed personal space, time on his own with God, away from the demands of the crowds.

Whatever our experience of God, we know that, in our human relationships, talking to someone about something involves spending time together, both talking and listening to each other. Do we transfer this to our relationship with God? In the busyness of everyday life, it can be difficult to make time to focus on God. Stillness can help but it doesn't always come easily or naturally to us; rather, it may require some determination to ignore distractions or set them aside. Noises within us can be even more insistent than those around us.

A few years ago, during Covid restrictions, I and some other people were asked to contribute to a service on the theme of 'Listening for God'. Needless to say, we all had different approaches to the topic. I talked about 'nudges and

whispers'. Here is part of what I said:

'In the midst of life's daily routine, I try to be open to God's nudges and whispers. Something I hear on the radio or a friend's passing remark is just as capable of making me turn to God as listening to a fine piece of music, albeit in a different way. Just taking a few moments to stand quietly at a window can enable me to become conscious of God's presence – usually a nudge, or a whisper of reassurance before I return to the task at hand.'

Our recent series of summer house group gatherings focused on the theme of 'Encouragement and nourishment: people, places and things'. It was both interesting and inspiring to hear other people's experiences. On one level it was an opportunity to get to know each other better, but it was also a good illustration of how we all experience God in different ways, even if God's name was not always mentioned. Often it is only with hindsight that we can see how God was working through our life experiences, shaping not only our characters but also our faith.

It seems to me that, as individual people of faith, the quality of our ability to listen, support and minister to others can only be enriched and strengthened by our relationship with, and listening to, God. How much more could this be true of us as the body of Christ here in Downing Place?

As we move forward in our search for a minister, are we talking to God about it? I believe that we can be praying not just that God will prompt the right person to apply, but also that God is even now preparing them and us (along with the other churches in our Mission Partnership). Let us pray too for the members of the Call Group as they work on our behalf.

Now that the busyness of September is upon us, with many demands on our time and energy, it may seem unrealistic to be advocating that we should spend more time with God. It was John Wesley (1703-1791) who said: 'I have so much to do that I spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it.' While few of us would feel able to do exactly the same, surely it underlines the importance of setting aside time to focus on God.

So, whatever is on your mind at the moment, 'Have you talked to God about it?' May God bless and guide us all.

Elizabeth

STEPHEN THOMPSON – A PROFILE



I was born in the Mill Road maternity hospital in April 1983, six months before the Rosie opened on the Addenbrookes site. The Mill Road hospital was originally the Cambridge Union workhouse, built in 1838 following the so-called ‘new’ poor law of 1834 (of which more below). Despite having lived here for most of my life, my family tree is rooted outside the city, in Lancashire and Leicestershire, where my mother and father were born in the 1940s. My parents met through the church; both came from the Churches of Christ strand of the URC. History teaching and ministry are the two most prominent vocations in the last three generations of my family history, which includes five historians and five ministers.

My earliest memories of church are of being part of the Junior Church at Emmanuel, initially in the nursery, and then moving up through the Carey Group, John Williams Group and finally CID (Christian Investigation Department). Church family outings included picnics at Wandlebury, as well as weekends at Hengrave Hall, near Bury St Edmunds. I joined YPSEG (Young People’s Sunday Evening Group) when I was 13 and enjoyed the weekly fellowship and fun - especially frisbee in the summer – until I left Cambridge for my gap year in 2001. YPSEG holidays were also a particular highlight: we travelled to Germany, North Yorkshire (during the foot and mouth outbreak), and Houghton. I remain immensely grateful to all of the Junior Church and YPSEG leaders for nurturing me in the faith. I was baptised and received into church membership in 1998.

Having decided to follow in the footsteps of my older brothers by applying to Cambridge to read History, I took a different gap year path by not going to the Pfalz region of Germany. Instead I split my time between volunteering at the URC's National Youth Resource Centre at Yardley Hastings and working as one of the 'Blue Angels' at the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland. Both experiences exposed me to a much richer understanding of Christian discipleship and I made connections with people from all over the world.

I spent just over a decade studying, researching and teaching history at the university from 2002 to 2013. My PhD research was concerned with the formation of the modern British state during the Industrial Revolution. I used census-taking, which began in 1801, as a case-study to assess how the central administrative state ('London' in today's political rhetoric) measured the economic and social life of Britain. I was extremely fortunate to be a member of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, which is based in the Geography Department, just up the road from Downing Place. It was because of my connection to this research group that I became interested in the history of the English poor laws, which evolved from a system of parish-based 'outdoor' relief in the late sixteenth century, that was reasonably responsive to seasonal unemployment and life cycle poverty, to the Victorian system of confinement in the poor law union workhouse, made (in)famous by Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. The last research paper I wrote – for a conference to mark the retirement of my research supervisor – examined some of the eighteenth-century antecedents of the Victorian workhouse in two different contexts: the rapidly growing metropolis and rural Suffolk. A key finding of the paper – as relevant in the early 2010s as it is today – was that the allegedly excessive 'burden' of welfare expenditure has been a persistent feature of English economic and social history for a very long time and, more often than not, government efforts to tackle that burden via punitive deterrence measures have generally failed to reduce poverty.

My association with the Geography Department was how I met my wife, Elizabeth, who did her PhD at the same time as me. Despite both working in London shortly after we were married, we decided to settle in Cambridge in 2014. We bought our house from two former Emmanuel members, Ken and Val Livesley. Samuel arrived in 2017 and it has been very helpful in recent years to be so close to both his grandparents' wider garden (for cricket) and the new playing field at Darwin Green (for football).

Had the Global Financial Crisis not hit when it did, I might still be an academic.

Instead, I decided to change track and applied to the Financial Services Authority (FSA) graduate scheme in 2012. The FSA was appealing because of the opportunity to do high profile economic policy work, rather than writing its history. I spent just over two years at the FSA's successor body – the Financial Conduct Authority – before moving to the Bank of England ten years ago. For all of that time I've worked on and led teams that supervise large UK banks. It's an incredibly varied role, the main purpose of which is to ensure that banks are run in a safe and sound way. No two days are ever the same and the last decade has given me a front row seat as various economic challenges have unfolded, including Brexit, Covid-19, and the Truss government's mini-budget.

My financial experience has led me to take on two new church roles since the pandemic. For the last four years I've been a trustee, and latterly deputy chair, of the United Reformed Church Trust. The Trust is responsible for the funds of the URC General Assembly, which is the denomination's governing body. These funds mainly consist of local URCs' regular giving to the Ministry and Mission Fund, which pays for ministry; education and learning; children and youth work; and mission programmes. The role has given me a wider perspective on the resourcing challenges facing the church, as well as some of the potential opportunities ahead. The vision behind the [Church Life Review](#), which was established in 2020, is to build a flourishing church, less burdened and better enabled by developing new ways of working and practical resources to help local churches meet their (increasing) statutory and regulatory obligations. The other role that I've taken on is joining Downing Place's Finance Committee, which has confirmed in my mind the need for the Church Life Review to move from vision to delivery.



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Outside balance sheets, I enjoy singing in the Downing Place choir, notwithstanding my lack of confidence as the sole tenor when Owen is playing the organ elsewhere. I am also an enthusiastic fell-walker, having spent most of my childhood holidays from age six or seven following in the footsteps of Alfred Wainright's *Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells*. It was a delight

to spend a hot weekend at the end of July re-treading some of those paths with both of my older brothers for the first time in 30-odd years.

DAVID THOMAS 1944-2026 : A TRIBUTE

David grew up in Chester of Welsh parents. He started training in the building industry at the age of 15, doing a five-year apprenticeship in joinery; then, through part-time study, he achieved Licentiate of the Institute of Building. Looking for wider experience, he moved to Cambridge, working initially with Johnson and Bailey, and then with Kerridge, and Platonoff & Harris, specialist joinery and bespoke furniture contractor, where he stayed for the rest of his professional life, ending up as Managing Director. Their clients included the Houses of Parliament, Addenbrookes, Claridges, and Januarys estate agents.

David first met Daphne in Llandudno in 1959. They were married in December 1968 and have spent all their married life in Cambridgeshire. Mark was born in 1972 and Peter in 1974. David was brought up in the Welsh Presbyterian Church in Chester and soon found St Columba's Church when he moved to Cambridge. In the early 1970s a Young Couples Group was formed with David as its unofficial leader. Eight current members and friends were part of that group.



David's years of service

David was elected as an elder of St Columba's in February 1973, aged just 28 and served until November 2004, a staggering 31 years and 8 months. During this time, he also served as Session Clerk (now known as Church Secretary) from June 1980 to February 1988. To fill a vacancy, David was co-opted back into the eldership in 2006, mainly to help with pastoral matters but ended up again in the elders' meeting until 2015, giving him over 40 years of service in total.

As well as the eldership, David served on various committees, the first of which was the World Mission group, which at that time was run jointly with Emmanuel. His professional expertise naturally led him into the St Columba's buildings group and its later iterations. Over many years he took a leading part in projects ranging from small repairs in the church and manse to major Sanctuary renovations in the 1970s, the reconstruction of St Columba's Hall, and essential roof restoration work. He knew the church buildings intimately: every nut and

bolt, the pipes and drains, the flooded cellar to the redundant belltower - he was the person who knew most about all aspects of the Church's property and its maintenance.

When St Columba's and Emmanuel came together as Downing Place Church there was the opportunity to adapt the old buildings into a complex of facilities more suited to our future service. David had a key role in the successful development of the plans right through to completion, as part of the Building Group and subsequently the Property Management Group. During the almost continuous negotiations with architects and builders, his ability to deal with numerous contractors underpinned the work of the Building Group in navigating the decisions and inevitable problems that arose during the build. Underlying all was the desire for the high quality evident in the finished building.

There are so many details in the new building that demonstrate David's care and attention – the amazing woodwork, the display of the old organ pipes, the location of the Missionary and other Memorial Boards, the use of the oak screens in the garden. He was so proud of finding those “nooks and crannies” where he could install bits and pieces from the two churches. But the underlying structure is also something that reflects his input.



The work of the Buildings Group was phenomenal, and crucial to the union, and David is given huge credit for facilitating teamwork in the group for the best part of six years. One of the architects said Downing Place Church was one of the best clients they had ever had, because they could make decisions and stick to them. David had clear aims for the redevelopment of St Columba's premises, and he rolled up his sleeves and worked tirelessly. His control of the project was exemplary, resulting in the project being completed within budget and on time, and all that during a global pandemic, multiple lockdowns and social distancing.

Those who worked with David have said '*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*' – 'If you seek his monument, look around you'.

How we will remember David

David had many qualities and was well known and respected by many, many members of St Columba's and later Downing Place Church. He was a very **SPECIAL** person.

S David was **Supportive** to fellow Elders, guiding them through their responsibilities and duties. It was David who identified the need for the Minister to have an Elder and served as Elder to all the Ministers during his time. Successive ministers have hugely appreciated David's care of the manse over the years. Members have relied on his faith, support and integrity, when involved in house groups.

P David had great **Practical** gifts. He would calmly and efficiently deal with almost any situation, such as telling workmen making a din outside while a service was in progress to be quiet for a bit, to recycle the bottles after noon, or on the rare occasions when someone would wander in at the back of the church seemingly intent on being disruptive calmly usher him out. When one of our members moved into their first house in Cambridge with nowhere to store books, David built and installed a bookshelf for them. He also enhanced a new Medical Practice in the village of Over with a beautifully crafted display cabinet for the waiting room. David was a good friend to the Group Therapy Centre - always kind, friendly and supportive. He regularly helped with the maintenance of the Centre - if he could help, he did; if not, he knew a man who could. His service also reached the wider Synod and Westminster College.

E David was **Enthusiastic** about all the projects in which he was involved. Those who remember him as Session Clerk said he carried out the role with enthusiasm and dedication. He was the sort of person you would always want to be in that position, in that every decision made would be considered carefully and delivered for the general benefit of all members.

C David's **Commitment** to the Church was unquestioned. He was active in all aspects of church life: regular attendance at house groups, social events, concerts. David was not merely present; he was engaged. He served with his hands, with his mind, with his time, and with his heart. He undertook his Elder's duties conscientiously, faithful in visiting his group. One member remembers David's visits when her father was staying with her and was terminally ill. On the last visit, David read the metrical version of Psalm 121. At that stage, her father had few words, but he looked very settled, smiled and said "lovely". His close relatives said how much they appreciated David's friendship and support. Other members say that David was utterly reliable and fully committed to every task he

took on. He wanted things done well, not for his own recognition, but because he believed that the church deserved the care, the highest quality, and exceptional stewardship.

I David was **Interested** in all that was going on, empathising but never interfering. He tried to help others to do their job, by encouraging them and gently demonstrating how to do it well.

A David was always **Approachable** for young and old alike. Comments from younger members include ‘he was a quiet and gentle man’; ‘was he the friendly dude with grey hair, married to Daphne?’; ‘he always smiled at us.’

L David was a **Loyal** friend to both present and former members, so generous with his time. Members talk about David providing a real welcome when they were new. One member enjoyed his company and enthusiasm on the golf course and others benefitted from a visit from David while he was en route to or from the golf course. If he and Daphne found themselves near former members of the church while on holiday, he would visit them and return with news of how he had found them in their new environment. He and Daphne were an incredibly warm, thoughtful and caring couple.

In summary, not only was David a devoted, friendly, dignified man who will be deeply missed, and lovingly remembered, but also a gifted, talented, conscientious man – a worthy and true “Pillar of the Kirk”.

Jenny Jacobsberg and Yvonne Norgett

with thanks for the many contributions from church members and friends

THE AUGUST 2026 SOLAR ECLIPSE

Now then – where were you around 7pm on Wednesday 12th August 2026?

I was sitting on the garden patio, looking towards the north-west. I settled down there soon after 6pm, ready to take a few photos from my phone. We had been given plenty of notice of the “once in a generation” event about to unfold. In the course of its elliptical orbit around the Earth, the Moon passes between the Sun and the Earth, casting a shadow that partially or completely blocks sunlight from reaching the Earth. This happens just a few times a year and is visible from various regions around the world. The August 12th, 2026, solar eclipse was the deepest partial eclipse visible from the UK since 1999, with the Sun turning into a thin crescent in most locations.

As the deadline for the receipt of *Place Matters* contributions approached, it seemed to me (as Editor) that we had, somehow, to mark, and to celebrate, that remarkable event in this September issue of our monthly magazine. I was willing to write something, but I emailed astronomer Robert Smith to ask if he could

send me a few paragraphs. I've done my best to 'blend' our two contributions.



*12th August 2026,
8 minutes past 7pm
– taken by Tim Rowland*

Robert: In May 2024, I described in *Place Matters* the remarkable total eclipse of the Sun whose track stretched up the eastern seaboard of the United States and was probably seen by more people than ever before. In 1999, Eleanor and I had travelled to the Channel Islands, and viewed the total eclipse in August of that year from the island of Alderney, through cloud. I vividly remember seeing the shadow of the Moon rushing towards us over the sea to the west, the temperature dropping and birds stopping singing. The only time we saw the Sun all day was at the moment of eclipse, when the clouds cleared a little.

Tim: For a week or two before the event it seemed that I couldn't turn on the radio or open

a newspaper without being alerted, and we were warned not to look directly at the Sun without 'eclipse' sunglasses. Projected image alternatives included a pinhole camera (that took me back ...) and – yes – John Lewis reported a surge in the sale of vegetable colanders (despite nobody that I know of finding them effective – the holes are too large for a clear image).

Robert: To watch last Wednesday's partial eclipse I simply walked for five minutes to the house and large garden of a neighbour who had offered to hold an eclipse party. Sadly, I was the only one who went, but it was a pleasant sociable evening (you can't spend the whole two hours looking at the Sun!). Some 90% of the Sun was obscured at maximum: my friends had proper eclipse glasses, but I had also brought white card on a music stand. Holding another card with a pinhole in it in front of the white card also gave a clear image.

We chatted, drank beer and kept a regular eye on the progress of the eclipse. We caught the beginning of the eclipse, but the Sun was quite low in the sky, so it disappeared behind trees before the end. It was, however, fascinating to follow the progress of the eclipse as the Moon passed over the image of the Sun. Real

eclipse chasers would have chosen a better site, but we were happy with our experience.

Tim: my ‘bright idea’ was to take a photo of the same view every quarter of an hour between 6 and 8pm – our (dried out!) lawn, with a large tree in a nearby garden and houses in the next street. I had expected that the view would become dimmer as the Moon progressed across the Sun, then brighter after the eclipse. I was disappointed! I couldn’t detect much difference between the images – and by 8pm the Sun was beginning to set anyway.

This was the first total solar eclipse visible over mainland Europe since 1999, with Spain and northern Portugal among the places to see totality. By a remarkable – to me – coincidence, the Sun is 400 times more distant from the Earth than the Moon is, AND (wait for it) the diameter of the Sun is 400 times greater than the diameter of the Moon. As a consequence, a total eclipse is exact, with no gaps or overlaps when viewed from the Earth, and that stunning ‘halo’ effect - the corona - around the Moon. It’s all down to geometric ‘similarity’.

Reporting from Spain, BBC science correspondent Pallab Ghosh, an Imperial College London physics graduate, described the moment when daylight faded and thousands of people fell silent together. He was visibly moved as he noted how events like this “remind us of what it is to be human” — how they draw us into shared wonder, connect us across differences, and invite us to pause before the vastness of creation.

All this brought to mind “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8)

Any further commentary from us would be superfluous.

Tim Rowland, Robert Smith



*Photograph by
StillVision Photography*



*The Corona Image
©NASA/Keegan Barber*

HELEN BELL – NEW ZEALAND WITH THE COUNCIL FOR WORLD MISSION



As some of you may know, in January I took up a new role as Mission Practitioner (Children) for the URC's Eastern Synod. Not many months into my role, I had the amazing opportunity to go to Aotearoa, New Zealand to participate in a Council for World Mission programme focusing on how we might re-vision

children's ministry. With only one other participant from Europe, I met the most wonderful people including from as far afield as Zambia, India, Trinidad, the Pacific Islands, Hong Kong and South Korea. Together we visited a wide variety of churches and schools to consider how Christian education might be shaped for today's society, paying attention to the legacy of missionary approaches and systems.

I was asked to attend as a 'resource person.' This was both exciting and daunting! My initial thoughts were: *"What would I say? Why me? What did I have to offer?"* I wasn't sure what to prepare. The programme content seemed vague and open to changes. I spoke to a good kiwi friend and she said to me, *"Go-with-the-flow... get to know the people and what they need. Then you will know what you can offer them"*. This was well outside my comfort zone! So, I left Cambridge to travel around 12,000 miles, with no lesson plan, agenda or power point. Instead, all I took were a few objects that I sometimes use when sharing Outofthebox stories.

There is so much I could share here about my stay and the incredible experiences I had, but I will focus on some occasions when I had the joy of sharing stories with others. I catch myself feeling embarrassed to admit this here. My inner critic chimes, *"What, Helen, you were sent to the other side of the world, 'just to have fun'?"* My loving self knows that to experience joy, to play, and to have fun are life-giving. They are not add-ons, something to be squeezed in when there is time. I think our culture privileges busyness, how seriously we take things, how productive we are. Yet, God is a playful creator. They created the world. They created us. They

made time to play and to rest.

Serious Play

We visit Ōhope Marae (also known as Te Maungarongo). This is the official national marae for Te Aka Puaho, the Māori Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. A ‘marae’ is a Māori sacred meeting house. It is a beautiful and sacred place, and I feel the pressure (self-inflicted) of creating something spiritual and memorable. What to do?! A colleague suggests I go for a walk in the garden and see what God is telling me. Obediently I go, not sure what I am supposed to be looking for. I walk down the beautiful lawn, listening to the tui (native bird) singing in the trees and the ocean lapping in the distance. As I approach the gate (waharoa) of the marae I bend down. A young child runs over and asks curiously, “What are you doing?” I tell them, somewhat foolishly, that I am looking for a stick. The child says nothing further and we start running up and down the lawn, laughing and chasing one another. Me holding a stick in my hand and the acceptance of a child in my heart.

I enter the garden to earnestly seek out the voice of the adult God and instead I find, what Graham Adams calls, ‘God the Child’. Cole Arthur Riley writes in her beautifully poetic book, ‘This Here Flesh’, that ‘children are made of awe’ and that when ‘we encounter the freedom of a child, we can choose to participate in their liberation’. As we race up and down the garden, I am free. I have chosen liberation! In chasing together, I have stopped being the grown-up I think I *should* be. Instead, this child hands me the invitation to ‘grow down’ (Adams). And it is very good.

Returning to the marae, reclaiming the playful spirit of my childhood, I invite my colleagues to join me for an OutoftheBox story called ‘The Stick That Was Stuck.’ I am now free to ask the group what they need. At the start of each OutoftheBox session we introduce the values that underpin all we do – “*now we have time to breathe, in a circle of trust...*”.

Today, many of the group choose the value “to play”. So, we set to work on the serious business of playing together, to discover laughter, connection and new meanings.

The ‘shushers’ and the disruptors

It is Pentecost Sunday. We are at a Pasifica church for a second time. I feel welcomed and I cannot help but smile because of the love these people show us and the wholehearted love they have for Jesus. I have been asked to share a story with the children and young people of the church. I am shown to a separate room where I find chairs positioned in rows and a table and board at the front. I



am thankful that some of my CWM colleagues have come with me and together we rearrange the room. I feel rebellious and powerful as we move the chairs and rearrange the furniture. Perhaps this doesn't sound much, but to me being compliant is my default (childlike) position. So, to move things, even little things like chairs, is an act of disruption, made possible, I later realize, because of the trust

and love others have given me to facilitate this space. Together we create a circle and a place for me to sit on the ground. Circles symbolize equality. No beginning, no end. There is no hierarchy, nobody that is above another person, nobody that is better than anyone else.

People – lots of people – stream into the room. I start to feel a bit panicky. *What do they expect? What do I have to offer them?* I calm myself and begin to place the coloured felt circles on the ground, steadying myself. *Now we have time to breathe.* As we start to share together, I notice the shushing. The sound of adults quietly muttering, perhaps saying, without saying, *Be quiet. Listen to the grown-up in the room. Adults matter more than children. Children should be seen and not heard.* Echoes of the past perhaps. Of their own experience.

I invite the children to join me on the floor. Some of them do, and excitedly they touch the sand, making a mess, creating chaos. I am aware of a young person with disabilities who is still seated, seemingly held back by caring adults around them. I make a space on the floor and invite them to sit next to me. They come. I smile and I place a wooden person in their hands. They touch the sand. There is a place for them. We are disruptors. Their presence is familiar; they help me to rest in God's presence. In their inarticulacy I hear the whisper of God the Child. *You are enough.*

Blessed to be a blessing

At the end of our stay, the participants – we are now friends – write messages to each other. This is one message to me: *"You have been a blessing to us. The stories you told us for me personally is like a nourishment. God bless you!! From Vanuatu."* I realise that the most important thing that I took to Aotearoa New Zealand was my-self. There I discovered what it is to trust my inner wisdom, to laugh and to play with others. To take delight in new friends and for them to delight in me. The leader trusted me to share what was needed. I met beautiful people in beautiful places, and I encountered a God who says, *'In you I am well pleased.'*

AN INSIGHT INTO OUR RECENT JUNIOR CHURCH SESSIONS

Over the summer, Junior Church has been exploring stories from the Bible and thinking about how God is with us as we grow, learn and journey together.

At the beginning of July we heard the story of finding a wife for Isaac. To set the story in context, we constructed a family tree, recalling God's promise to Abraham and Sarah of a child in their old age, and remembering Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons. We heard about the servant's camel ride across the desert and how God answered his prayer to help him find the right person. Some of the children made camels, while others created elaborate saddle bags for carrying jewels.



A few weeks later, we turned our attention to seeds and the way that small things can grow into something much bigger, remembering that just as a tiny seed can grow, small things done by all God's people together can make a big difference. During Sharing Together, David showed us pumpkin seeds and reminded us of the mustard seed in one of Jesus' stories. In the Hub we looked at seeds and heard the story of the sower from Matthew 13. When looking for somewhere to plant some nasturtium seeds in the church garden, we realised that leaving them

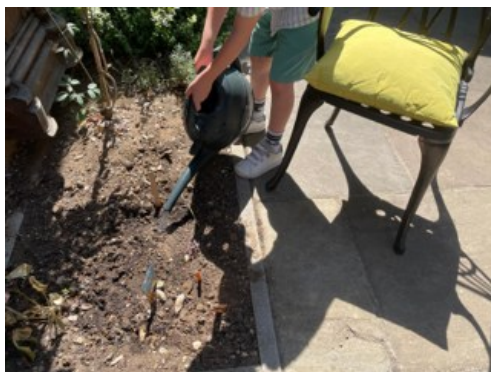
on the path would not be a good idea, as they would not grow and the birds might eat them! Instead, we found a clear patch, carefully sowed the seeds and watered them. We thanked God for the sun, rain and wind, and hoped that the seeds would grow into bright and beautiful flowers later in the year. As we enjoyed some pieces of apple we heard about Johnny Appleseed, who shared apple trees with farms across America, and enjoyed imagining his hope that one day there would be apples for everyone to share.

On the morning of 9th August, a sunny Sunday, we were thinking about another well-known Bible story. After Janet reminded us of

the story of Joseph and his brothers, the older children gathered in the courtyard garden while the youngest children kept cool in our room. Using dressing-up clothes, we imagined Joseph's coat of many colours, and used coloured chalks to draw pictures and stories. We also checked on our nasturtium seeds. They had not yet germinated, reminding us that growing things takes patience and, in this case, a little more water! We sang 'I Love the Sun' and gave thanks to God for making us.

In church on 23rd August, we heard many people's names using their initials to find them, reminding us that we are all together as God's people and that we are all on the path. Our group then followed a trail through the Hub, Hall and garden, where we were delighted to find that our nasturtiums were finally sprouting. We watered them and recalled some of the places we had walked during the summer. Then we thought some more about the story of Moses and the very interesting path he travelled. We drew around our feet and decorated the pictures, before praying about the paths we would follow in the coming week. Through all these stories, activities and adventures, we have been reminded that, whether we are planting tiny seeds, following a trail or facing an uncertain journey, God is with us.

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.



Photos taken by Yvonne Norgett and Rosemary Johnston

DOWNING PLACE URC SPECIAL CAUSE

SEPTEMBER 2026: TOOLS WITH A MISSION



Tools with a Mission (TWAM) is a UK-based Christian charity that collects unwanted but usable tools, refurbishes them, and sends them as complete vocational toolkits to community groups and training centres in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its core purpose is to help people learn practical trades - such as carpentry, tailoring, mechanics, welding, agriculture, and IT- so they can build sustainable livelihoods and break the cycle of poverty.

TWAM's volunteers across England and Wales clean, repair, and sort thousands of donated tools each year, preventing over 200 tonnes of equipment from going to landfill and significantly reducing CO₂ emissions. This environmental stewardship is central to their mission. In several locations, TWAM volunteers who have organised themselves into local groups. They work together to promote TWAM in their community through talks and attending local events. They collect tools and sort them before a TWAM van collection. Some of the groups also carry out basic refurbishment, such as removing rust and sharpening. All have some kind of storage space, from a room in a local church to a big shed in a garden or garage space.

The refurbished tools are shipped in structured kits to more than 500 organisations, enabling vocational centres to expand training capacity, improve course quality, and support vulnerable people seeking economic independence. Many TWAM-graduates use these skills to secure employment or start small businesses, strengthening their communities long-term.

TWAM also enriches UK communities by offering meaningful volunteering opportunities that build confidence, reduce isolation, and promote sustainable reuse. Overall, the charity combines poverty relief, environmental responsibility, and community empowerment to create lasting change locally and globally.

WAYS OF GIVING TO OUR SPECIAL CAUSE

- ◆ Special Collection at worship on Sunday 20th September 2026 (cash, cheque or card)
- ◆ Wednesday Lunchtime Concerts (cash or card)
- ◆ Direct to the church bank account (reference SPECIAL CAUSE)
- ◆ Via [Home - Downing Place URC](#) - the 'Donate' button is on the homepage. Select **Special Donations** as the fund



It's time for a
**Macmillan
Coffee Morning**
and you're invited

Downing Place United Reformed Church, CB2 3EL
Friday 25 September, 10.30am - 2pm

Let's do whatever it takes to make cancer
care better for everyone, wherever and
wherever they are

**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**



Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (26107), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Also operating in Northern Ireland. MAC20383

LECTIO DIVINA - CREATIONTIDE

A new series of lectio divina will begin on Friday September 11th continuing on the 18th, 25th and finishing on October 2nd.

We will follow the theme of Creation in this designated season. This will be held on zoom at the familiar time of 8.30 to 9.30am each Friday, with 40 minutes of lectio and 20 minutes of sharing our perspectives. People are welcome to simply sit and listen.

If you have not tried this way of meditating on a scripture passage before, you are welcome to try as a one-off!

Further details if needed from Deborah or William McVey on deborahmcv@aol.com or wmmcvey@aol.com



A recent tea gathering, we are truly ecumenical!

The Lord's Prayer



Graphic from www.clipart-library.com Used by permission.

Exploring words we know well, to help us know God better

Two slots to choose from:

Monday evenings at 7.30 online (link will appear in weekly notices);

Thursday afternoons at 2.30 at the church

Six meetings, in the weeks beginning

October 5, 12 and 19,

and November 2, 9 and 16

Led by Janet Bottoms and John Proctor.

Come along. You will be very welcome.

If you've not been before, why not try coming?

This is a good way to deepen our faith, and broaden our friendships.

No special knowledge is needed. There's no pressure on anyone to speak.

If you have a Bible handy, bring it – but there are extra copies at church.

HUB DISPLAYS

Have you noticed the displays that have appeared in the Hub over the last few months?

The **Hub Advisory Group**, a subgroup of the Evangelism and Service Group, has been putting these together to bring a little colour, interest and reflection into the Hub. Christian Aid, Pentecost, Easter and Accession, and Water - all themes that we have seen represented on top of the cupboards next to the door out of the Hub into the yard.



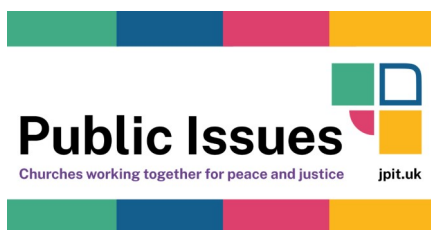
Moving forward, the aim is that these displays will draw on the life of the church, the Christian year and issues that connect us with the wider world. Some will reflect particular seasons or themes in the church calendar, while others may highlight our monthly Special Cause, or issues that have something to say to us as a community. There will also be opportunities to explore themes from the work of **JPIT** (the Joint Public Issues Team), a partnership between the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, which helps the Churches work together for peace and justice by listening, learning, praying, speaking and acting on public issues.

We hope what appears in the Hub (on top of the cupboard and in the glass cabinet by the door in the sanctuary) will catch the eye, spark curiosity and give us an opportunity to pause and reflect; helping us to explore different aspects of our faith and our life together, and connect with the wider world. We want to make use of different ways of expressing and sharing ideas. Words, photographs, artwork, objects, poems and prayers can all help to bring a particular theme to life. The next display will be for **Creationtide**, followed by themes including Commitment for Life, Remembrance and The Promise, Advent, Christmas and

Epiphany.

So do take a moment to look when you are in the Hub. If you have something that might contribute to a future display, or an idea for a theme you would like to see explored, please talk to a member of the Hub Advisory Group; Jane Bower, Janet Bottoms, Owen Saxton, Sue Bush or Jess Uden (Convenor).

We hope this will continue to bring interest and inspiration to the Hub, giving us all an opportunity to see familiar things - and perhaps some less familiar ones - in a new light.



The **Public Issues Calendar** collects together observances in the year when Christians and those across wider society might focus their attention on certain movements towards peace and justice.

Not all of these occasions are necessarily marked by **JPIT** or our associated churches: their inclusion is not an indication of endorsement.

SEPTEMBER

1 Sept–4 Oct: Creation Time, Creation-tide or Season of Creation

6 Sept: National Food Bank Day

7 Sept: Education Sunday (England & Wales)

10 Sept: World Suicide Prevention Day

20 Sept: Peace Sunday

20–27 Sept: Disability Awareness Week

21 Sept: UN International Day of Peace

21 Sept–4 Oct: Fairtrade Fortnight

19–25 Sept: World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel TBC

26 Sept: International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

27 Sept: Disability Awareness Sunday

28 Sept–4 Oct: Good Money Week



Sunday 4 October at 4pm
Great St Mary's, Cambridge

LIVING WATER

An ecumenical Choral Evensong
for the Season of Creation

- Preacher: The Rev'd Dr Janet Tollington
- The Choir of Great St Mary's Church

CENTRAL
CAMBRIDGE
ECUMENICAL
NETWORK

SEPTEMBER DIARY

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Tue	01-Sept-26	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2.30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Tue	01-Sept-26	Worship, Discipleship & Spirituality Group Meeting	7.30pm	Online
Wed	02-Sept-26	Lunchtime Concert - Mihaly Gyorfi (piano)	1:00pm	Main Church
Thu	03-Sept-26	Midweek Worship led by Dr Janet Bottoms	11:00am	Main Church
Thu	03-Sept-26	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sun	06-Sept-26	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Main Church
Sun	06-Sept-26	Sunday Worship with Holy Communion, led by The Reverend Dr. Janet Tollington	11:00am	Main Church
Tue	08-Sept-26	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2.30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Tue	08-Sept-26	Elders' Meeting	7:30pm	The Saxton's
Wed	09-Sept-26	Lunchtime Concert - Seth Schulteis, piano	1:00pm	Main Church
Wed	09-Sept-26	Intermediate Safeguarding training	6:00pm	Gibson Hall
Thu	10-Sept-26	Prayer Meeting	10:15am	St Columba's Chapel
Thu	10-Sept-26	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion, led by the Reverend Professor David Thompson	11:00am	Main Church
Thu	10-Sept-26	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sun	13-Sept-26	No Choir Rehearsal	-	-
Sun	13-Sept-26	Fulbourn URC Harvest Festival	10.30am	Fulbourn URC
Sun	13-Sept-26	Sunday Worship, led by Mrs Faith Paulding	11:00am	Main Church
Sun	13-Sept-26	Church Meeting	12.30pm	Main Church
Tue	15-Sept-26	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2.30pm	St Athanasios' Church

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Wed	16-Sept-26	Lunchtime Concert - Eira Lynn Jones (pedal harp & lever harp)	1:00pm	Main Church
Thu	17-Sept-26	Midweek Worship led by the Reverend Deborah McVey	11am	Main Church
Thu	17-Sept-26	Gibson Lunch	12.30pm	Gibson Hall
Thu	17-Sept-26	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sun	20-Sept-26	Choir Rehearsal	10.00am	Main Church
Sun	20-Sept-26	Sunday Worship, led by Members of the Worship, Discipleship & Spirituality Group	11am	Main Church
Sun	20-Sept-26	Retiring Collection for Monthly Cause	12.00pm	Main Church
Sun	20-Sept-26	Open Table Cambridge Service	6pm for 6:30pm	Main Church
Mon	21-Sept-26	World Church & Public Issues Group	7.30pm	Online
Tue	22-Sept-26	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2.30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	23-Sept-26	Lunchtime Concert - James Kirby (piano)	1:00pm	Main Church
Thu	24-Sept-26	Midweek Worship with Holy Communion, led by the Reverend Elizabeth Caswell	11am	Main Church
Thu	24-Sept-26	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Fri	25-Sept-26	Macmillian Coffee Morning	10.30am	The Hub
Sat	26-Sept-26	Decorating the church for Harvest	2:00pm	Main Church
Sun	27-Sept-26	Choir Rehearsal	10.00am	Main Church
Sun	27-Sept-26	Harvest Festival Worship, led by Mr Richard Lewney	11am	Main Church
Sun	27-Sept-26	Solidarity Hub	6pm	The Hub
Tue	29-Sept-26	Cherry Hinton Road Tuesday Fellowship	2.30pm	St Athanasios' Church
Wed	30-Sept-26	Lunchtime Concert - Christine	1:00pm	Main Church

	Date	Name	Time	Location
Thu	1-Oct-26	Midweek Worship led by Dr Augur Pearce	11:00am	Main Church
Thu	1-Oct-26	Knit One Give One	1:30pm	The Hub
Sat	3-Oct-26	Local Maker's Market	11:00am	Main Church
Sun	4-Oct-26	Choir Rehearsal	10:00am	Main Church
Sun	4-Oct-26	Sunday Worship with Holy Communion, led by The Reverend Chris Baker	11:00am	Main Church
Sun	4-Oct-26	Ecumenical Evensong for Creation-tide - Central Cambridge Ecumenical Network	4:00pm	Great St Mary's Church



MEMBERS PREACHING ELSEWHERE IN SEPTEMBER



St Luke's Church, Cambridge

Photo by Tiger cc-by-sa/2.0

6 September

Penny Flynn - Bassingbourn & Melbourn

13 September

Elizabeth Caswell - Fulbourn URC

David Tatem - Bassingbourn URC

Janet Tollington - Melbourn URC

20 September

Janet Tollington - St Neot's URC

Penny Flynn - St Ives Free Church

Janet Bottoms - Fulbourn URC

Chris Baker - Melbourn URC

27 September

Elizabeth Caswell - Stetchworth & Cheveley URC

David Cornick - Melbourn URC

Janet Tollington - Buntingford URC

Simone Maghenzani - Via Verle 'Free Church', Turin (online)

Deborah McVey - St Luke's Church (Harvest)

LECTIONARY FOR SEPTEMBER

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.



6 September

(Trinity 14)

Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm 149
Romans 13:8-14
Matthew 18:15-20

20 September

(Trinity 16)

Exodus 16:2-15
Psalm 105:1-6,37-45
Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-16

13 September

(Trinity 15)

Exodus 14:19-31
Psalm 114
Exodus 15:1b-11,20-21
Romans 14:1-12
Matthew 18:21-35

27 September

(Trinity 17)

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 78:1-4,12-16
Philippians 2:1-13
Matthew 21:23-32



Nigella and sedum plants

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ITEMS FOR MAGAZINE:

Please send items to the Editor and Jess Uden

- preferably by email (see above)

WEB EDITOR: Jess Uden jess@downingplaceurc.org

Please send items to be included in the October edition
no later than **18th September 2026**