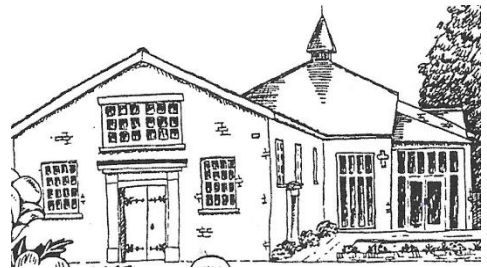


Stepping Stones

Newsletter for

EPPING UNITED
REFORMED CHURCH



ONGAR UNITED
REFORMED CHURCH

September 2025

Minister: Revd Karen Knight



Minister's Message

September marks the start of the new school year. I can still remember my first day at school - I cried. I was scared, everything seemed so big and I didn't know what was going to happen. What did happen is that I developed a life long passion for learning.

Although school is different these days some things never change, including starting a new school in a uniform two sizes too big because as Mum says: "You'll grow into it."

There are lots of new starts in life, new school, new job, new relationships. Whilst school starts in September the church year begins with Advent and of course January 1st is the New Year when resolutions are made but few last. When we accept Jesus Christ into our lives it is a new beginning and we can start each day afresh. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation, the old has passed away the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Or as Thomas Chisholm wrote:

Great is thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed thy hand has provided
Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.

May this month bring you a renewed sense of the closeness and love of Christ.

God Bless

Karen

Epping URC News

September Preaching Plan, all 11am

7th Revd Robert Pope *Holy Communion*
14th Babs and Len Ward
21st Efua Koi-Larbi
28th Local Arrangement
5th October Revd Tim Swindell *Holy Communion*

Dates for your Diary

- **Friday 19th September, 7:30pm:** 'The changing faces of non-conformity: the relevance of dissent for today' As part of our 400 Anniversary celebrations, Revd Dr Robert Pope will be coming to talk with us about the continuing significance of 'nonconformism'. Robert is an engaging, interactive speaker, currently the Director of Studies in Church History and Doctrine at Westminster College, Cambridge, and 'old' friend of the church. Do join us for what promises to be a fascinating and entertaining evening. Refreshments will be available, free admission, all welcome.
- **Saturday 27th September, 10:30am-Midday:** MacMillian Coffee Morning
- **Sunday 12th October, 11am:** Harvest Festival service, as usual we will be collecting non-perishable gifts for the Epping Forest Foodbank. The service will be followed by our AGM with reports available in advance. This will then be followed by lunch.

Birthdays

We wish a happy birthday this month to Barbara, Elspeth and Noah!

Toddler Group

The toddler group will resume from the 10th September following the summer break, when we will be welcoming new families who are joining us. This term we will be having a coffee morning in aid of Macmillan cancer support.

Epping Protests

It has been a very difficult and troubling summer in our town. At the end of July, the church released the following statement regarding the unrest jointly with St John's Church, St Albans Coopersale and Epping Restore Community Church:

"As churches we share in the distress of our community in recent days and weeks. We acknowledge the fears of so many of our friends and neighbours, and are shocked by public words of hate and anger. We recognise that we all have different experiences and viewpoints; what brings us together is our collective responsibility to live peacefully together and prioritise justice, kindness, and care for one another, remembering our shared humanity. With others we are praying and working for peace, patience, and unity, and for our community to remain a place of safety and welcome for all who live and work here."

We have hosted two prayer vigils which were both well attended by Christians from all over the town and beyond (including by our friends in Zimbabwe!). Churches in the ecumenical partnership, Eastern Synod, and across the whole denomination and beyond have praying for the situation in the town. We have also collected clothing and other items for the refugees and have supported local charities who are supporting the

refugees. The elders are involved in further responses both within the wider church and in the local community- please speak to them for more information.

The response to the protests were reported on by Churches Together in England:

In response to the increasingly violent demonstrations and counter-demonstrations in Epping, the local United Reformed Church will open its doors to offer a place of peace, silence and prayer to those who feel helpless and unheard. The gathering is timed at 2pm on Sunday, 27 July, to coincide with the large disorder planned this weekend, offering residents an alternative space.

Local Christians, who have long supported the asylum seekers housed in the hotel, are looking for further ways to reassure and calm the community.

Epping URC Elder Lindsey Brown said: “We are acutely aware that although local feeling is high the situation is being aggressively exploited by outside groups, including elected ‘leaders’.”

The first prayer meeting held earlier in the week was attended by members of six or seven other local churches. Lindsey said: “It was extremely wide-ranging. We prayed for all those impacted, but we prayed also for rain, and against any spread to other parts of the country.”

Philippians 4:6—Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Churches Together in England General Secretary, Bishop Mike Royal, said: “I’m grateful for local church and Christian voices of reason in Epping. There is nothing to be gained by the violence we have seen towards the police, asylum seekers and innocent people caught up in the disorder. An individual has rightly been arrested for the alleged crime; it’s time to de-escalate and work for calm and peace in the local community.”

<https://cte.org.uk/prayers-for-peace-in-epping/>

Prayer

O Lord, we thank you for all the blessings you pour out on us, and we pray for compassion, for wisdom, for peace in the heart of the anxious and fearful... mostly we pray that we are able to love our neighbour - whoever they are, wherever they're from, whatever their circumstances, whatever they've done - as we love ourselves. Amen. 🙏

400th Anniversary Roundup

- As stated above our next anniversary event is on Friday 19th September, 7:30pm by Revd Robert Pope will be talking to us about 'The changing faces of non-conformity: the relevance of dissent for today'

- We have a new framed painting of the church commissioned specially for the anniversary, painted by Janet's niece, Emma. It's not yet up on the wall but will be soon probably in the hallway. We also have the picture as a very tricky looking puzzle! The painting is available to have at a cost as cards or notelets-please speak to Janet.



- The 400th anniversary celebrations have been reported in the Epping town magazine 'Talk about Epping' available to view here: https://www.eppingtowncouncil.gov.uk/Talk_About_Epping_Town_Magazine_35173.aspx. We will hopefully pick a few paper copies and they are also available at Epping Hall and Epping Library.
- In July we received a nice letter congratulating us on our 400th anniversary from Downing Place URC in Cambridge as follows:

"I am writing from Downing Place URC in Cambridge to send warm congratulations on the 400th anniversary of Epping URC. You obviously celebrated in style with the concert organised by Stephen as well as marking the event with contributions from the junior church and a book on the history of the church. I also read that more events are planned during the year. This sounds fantastic and I wish you all the best for each of them. I'm sure this year will be one which will remain deep in the hearts of the members for many years to come."

With very best wishes, Pippa Jones, Church Secretary

Free items available

We have the following items in the church building which are surplus to our requirements, please speak to Jeremy if your interested in taking any:

- HP colour Officejet printer- approx. 6 years old in excellent working condition
- Xerox black and white laser printer- in excellent working condition
- Computer desk
- 2 office chairs

Ongar URC News

Christmas 2025

Yes, I know the summer is not quite ended and people are still on holiday or in holiday mood and don't want to think about Christmas just yet but it is only 117 days away as I write this on 30th August!!

I have received the Autumn Leprosy Mission catalogues, which contain Christmas cards and other gift ideas, and have left some copies on the table at the back of the church. Please take a copy and look through it, although there will be further items when the Christmas catalogue is published later in the Autumn.

I am also thinking of ordering the URC Prayer Handbook (£6.99 plus p&p) and Diary (£9.00 plus p&p), so if anyone would like me to order these on their behalf please let me know as we can save on postage by ordering together.

Similarly, I shall be taking orders for the 2026 edition of Fresh from the Word, which you have heard me refer to occasionally in sermons. This costs £13.99 plus p&p if ordered through me and there is a discount of 10% for ordering over 3 copies.

Please think about what you would like for 2026 and plan ahead! Shall I be the first to wish you all a Merry Christmas?!!

Joan

Open House

Open house continues to be a popular meeting place for friends to meet on a Wednesday morning. We share our news with each other, add a few pieces to the jigsaw puzzle and gather round the charity sales table for something to buy. If it happens to be somebody's birthday we enjoy a piece of birthday cake and sing the birthday song.

We would like to wish "Happy Birthday" to those having a birthday in September.

Service Dates for September All At 11.00

7 th	Mike Shelbourne	
14 th	Joan Smith	<i>Sacrament of Holy Communion</i>
21 st	Arthur Revels	
28 th	Karen Quelch	
5 th Oct	Rev Karen Knight	<i>Sacrament of Holy Communion & Coffee in hall</i>
afterwards		
12 th	Mike Shelbourne	<i>Coffee in hall afterwards</i>

Herts & Essex Border URC Mission Partnership

MacMillan Coffee Morning

MacMillan Coffee Morning at Roydon United Reformed Church on Saturday 6th September, 10am-12pm, all welcome.

Epping Forest Foodbank

Currently most needed items

- Tinned Fruit & Vegetables
- Tinned Meat
- Tinned Soup
- UHT Milk
- Fruit Juice
- Pet Food
- Laundry Tablets
- Tea & Coffee
- Toilet Rolls
- Deodorant
- Shampoo
- Puddings

A reminder there is a collection point at Epping URC- in the foyer.

A letter of gratitude and hope from the URC **Finance department**

***To: All members and adherents of United Reformed Churches and our
Local Ecumenical Partnerships***

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you all.

Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the faithfulness and generosity you have shown to God's work through your local churches. Your contributions - whether through time, talents, or treasure - have been a beautiful expression of discipleship and community.

Celebrating Faithful Stewardship

In these challenging times, when many families have faced difficult decisions about household budgets, rising energy costs, and the ongoing cost of living pressures, your continued commitment to supporting God's work has been truly remarkable. We have witnessed the church at its best: caring for one another, maintaining mission and ministry, and trusting in God's provision.

Your financial contributions through the Ministry & Mission Fund have enabled us to continue our shared calling across England, Scotland, and Wales. Through this Fund, we support ministers' stipends, theological training, Assembly gatherings, and the vital central services that strengthen our witness and ministry in every community we serve.

God's Provision in Action

We rejoice that in 2024, despite significant economic challenges, your collective giving to the M&M Fund reached £16.2m - slightly behind our budget, but late contributions in early 2025 would have taken us over the budget, had the auditors allowed us to bring them in. This achievement reflects not just financial commitment, but spiritual resilience and trust in God's faithfulness.

We are particularly grateful for the additional support from our Synods, who contributed approx. £2m of the amount noted above, demonstrating the interconnectedness of our church family. Total income for 2024, including investment income and grants etc. was £18.5m.

While our expenditure of £20m resulted in a deficit of £1.5m for 2024, we remain committed to balancing our budget over the next 4-6 years through difficult, but necessary reductions in central costs and continued partnership between local churches and Synods.

Looking Forward with Hope

As we move through 2025, we recognise that challenges remain. Economic pressures continue to affect both individuals and churches. Yet we face the future with confidence, knowing that God's call to faithful stewardship remains constant, and that together we can continue to serve Christ's mission in our communities.

We have a clear plan: Synods have committed to maintaining their enhanced support, and we are implementing careful budget reductions of an average of 3-5% annually in our central costs. This balanced approach ensures we remain good stewards while maintaining our essential ministries.

A Call to Continued Faithfulness

In the spirit of 2 Corinthians 9:7, your giving has been a source of joy and strength to the whole church. As we move forward, we invite you to continue this journey of faithful

stewardship, giving "as the Spirit directs and as our means allow." We understand that every church's situation is unique, and we celebrate with those who have been able to meet their full commitments, while also deeply appreciating those who, facing their own challenges, have continued to prioritise the M&M Fund within their means.

Partnership in Ministry

As officers of our denomination, we treasure our roots in local URC congregations and LEPs. We understand firsthand the joys and challenges of local church life, including the financial pressures you face. This shared experience strengthens our commitment to wise stewardship of the resources you entrust to us. Your local church treasurer has received detailed financial information and can answer specific questions about our accounts. If further assistance is needed, our finance team at Church House stands ready to help.

Our Deepest Thanks

To every member who has contributed to their local church, to every congregation that has supported the M&M Fund, and to all who have made this work a priority even in difficult times—thank you. Your faithfulness enables ministry to continue, training to be provided, and the gospel to be proclaimed across our three nations.

May God bless you abundantly as you continue to be faithful stewards of all that He has entrusted to you. Together, we participate in God's wonderful work of transformation, both in our own lives and in the world around us.

In Christ's service,

Alan Yates, Treasurer

Vaughan Griffiths, Deputy Treasurer

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." - 2 Corinthians 9:7

Fairtrade Fortnight 2025

Do it Fair this Fairtrade Fortnight

This Fairtrade Fortnight, whoever you are, there are many simple actions you can take to make the trade system fairer – leading to a fairer world for all who rely on it.

This Fairtrade Fortnight will be taking place **22 September – 05 October 2025**. Over these fourteen days we'll be asking each of you to **Do it Fair**. We'll be celebrating the difference

we can all make when we choose Fairtrade and campaign as part of a UK-wide movement calling for a fairer system behind the things we consume every day.

With the world in a tailspin, fairness isn't a given. But the power to get there is in our hands. Together, our actions can have a positive impact on real people's lives. Fairer pay. Fairer treatment. Fairer futures. That's Fairtrade. It's not just a label – it's a movement. So, whatever you do, and however you do it: **Do it Fair.**

This year's campaign is focusing particularly on tea. Do you enjoy a cuppa? How do you like it – with sugar? Strong? With milk? Apart from water, tea is the world's most popular drink. However, it is more than a drink, it's a daily ritual, a comfort, enjoyed during a break or while catching up with loved ones. In Britain we drink over 100 million cups of tea every day! However, behind every cuppa lies an untold story – the people who carefully pick the tea leaves and carry up to 30 kilograms on their backs at a time. They face poverty, unsafe working conditions and climate change, leaving them unable to plan for their future.

Ms Umawathi has worked at her tea estate for the last 35 years as a Tea Leaf Plucker. Starting as a temporary worker, she gained the security of a permanent position in 1990. Back then, the salary was just 34 rupees a day (less than 30p) and she brought up her family on that wage. 'Before Fairtrade came, wages were low. Us and the children had to survive on those wages. We had to manage everything within that.' Born and raised in the tea growing hills of South India, Ms Umawathi is raising her two sons here. 'Here, the children's education is supported by Fairtrade. ... They pay for the tuition as well... they also provide bus services... Those elsewhere don't get all of this'. With support from the Fairtrade Premium, her husband underwent an important eye operation. The tea estate now offers a regular eye clinic to its workers, their families and surrounding communities, providing glasses to those who need them and diagnosing any medical issues. Ms Umawathi feels passionately about improvements made to her working conditions: 'For me, Fairtrade is about environmental health. It should be a plastic free area, and the drinking water should be clean. Bathrooms should be... nearby.

The Fairtrade foundation is asking the UK government to Brew it Fair. Act by signing their petition

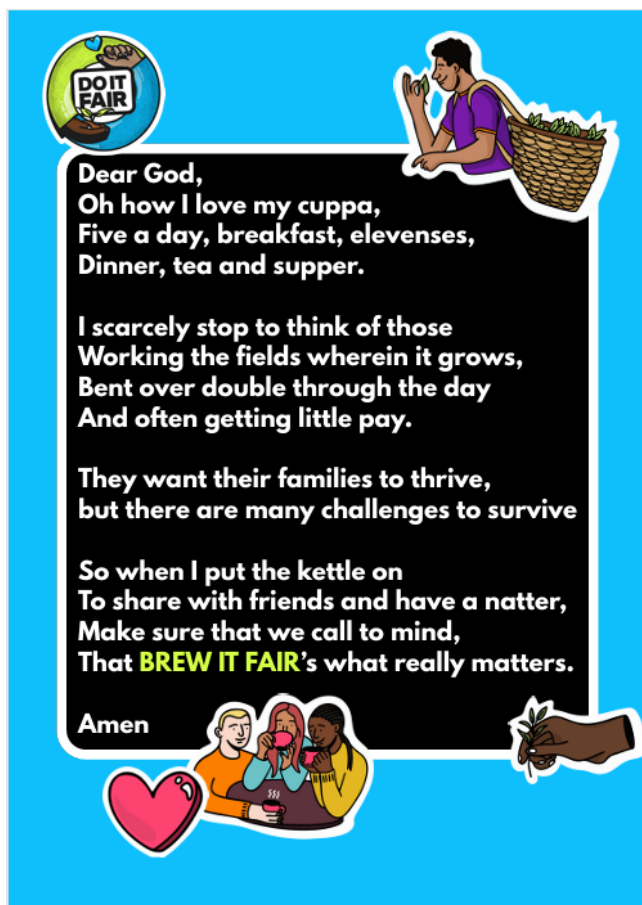
https://action.fairtrade.org.uk/page/171071/petition/1?ea.tracking.id=landing_page_button and calling on the government to take stronger action in the tea industry. In addition why not purchase Fairtrade Tea?



**FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT
2025**



Prayer



Season of Creation 2025

The Season of Creation (1 September - 4 October) is dedicated to God as the creator and sustainer of all life. During this period of the church calendar, many churches celebrate Harvest, thanking God for His provision through the land and food that is grown. It's a time when churches and congregations are called to pay special attention to the responsibility of humanity for the Earth and for all that lives upon it, and to pray for our world. The theme for the Season of Creation 2025 is peace with creation, based on Isaiah 32:14-18. The prophet Isaiah pictured the desolated Creation without peace because of the lack of justice and the broken relationship between people and God. This description of devastated cities and wastelands reveals how human destructive behaviours have a negative impact on the Earth.

Our hope: Creation will find peace when justice is restored. There is still hope and the expectation for a peaceful Earth. To hope does not mean to stand still and quiet, but to act, pray, change, and reconcile with Creation and the Creator in unity, repentance and solidarity.

The Symbol for 2025 is the Garden of Peace and is characterized by a dove carrying an olive branch bringing life to the Garden of Peace.

<https://seasonofcreation.org/>



Christian Aid Afghanistan Earthquake Appeal

An earthquake measuring 6.0 magnitude has struck eastern Afghanistan leaving at least 800 people dead, according to the UN. Life-saving rescue operations are needed to save the masses trapped under the rubble. Many more are in need of drinking water, food, shelter, blankets and cooking sets, and critical medical supplies.

Christian Aid has launched an emergency appeal.

By donating today, you can share hope with people in need and ensure local responders can continue to support people who have lost their homes, livelihoods and loved ones.

If you are able, please donate:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/afghanistan-earthquake-appeal?urc>