

CONTACT

April 2024



Volume 65 - Issue 4
Sawston Free Church

Churches Services and Dates for Your Diary

**SFC Services-(also available via zoom) SFC email: secretary@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk,
Sawston Free Church:**

07 April	10.30am : Morning Worship – Liz Caswell No Messy Church in April
14 April	10.30am: Holy Communion – Rev Phil Nevard
21 April	10.30am : Morning Worship – Rev Phil Nevard
28 April	10.30am : Go4th

The closing date for **May** Contact is **Thursday 18th April**

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to anne.nunn@btinternet.com**

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Contact

The monthly magazine of
Sawston Free Church United Reformed Methodist

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Dear Friends,

On our journey of discipleship together, we sometimes find ourselves faced with contentious issues that challenge our unity and test the bonds of our fellowship. It's during these times of disagreement that our ability to navigate with grace becomes essential in maintaining the harmony and love within our community.



Embracing Diversity:

Our church family is like a beautifully diverse tapestry, woven together by our shared faith in God. However, with diversity comes differing perspectives, experiences, and opinions. While these differences can sometimes lead to disagreement, they also enrich our community and offer opportunities for growth and learning.

Disagreeing with Grace:

Disagreement is a natural part of life, but how we handle it speaks volumes about who we are as individuals and as a community. Disagreeing with grace means approaching disagreements with humility, empathy, and respect for one another's viewpoints.

First and foremost, it's essential to listen. Take the time to truly understand the perspectives of others, even if they differ from your own. Listening allows us to empathise with one another's experiences and values, fostering a sense of understanding and connection.

Next, communicate with kindness and respect. Choose your words carefully, avoiding language that may be hurtful or divisive. Remember that we are all members of the same church family, bound together by our shared faith and love for God.

It's also important to recognise that it's okay to disagree. Our church is a safe space where differing opinions can coexist peacefully. We can learn and grow from one another's perspectives, even if we don't always see eye to eye.

Lastly, seek common ground. Despite our differences, there are often shared values or goals that we CAN rally around. By focusing on what unites us rather than what divides us, we can find solutions that honour the dignity and worth of every member of our community.

Moving Forward Together:

As we navigate through disagreements with grace, let us remember that our ultimate goal is unity in Christ. Though we may have differing opinions on specific issues, our shared faith in God binds us together as one body. Let us lean on His love and guidance as we strive to build a community characterised by grace, understanding, and respect. Together, we can embrace our diversity, navigate disagreements with grace, and emerge stronger and more united than ever before.



Every Blessing,
Rev'd Phil Nevard
Phil

Christian Aid Week: 12-18 May 2024



The focus this year is on "pushing back against extreme poverty"

We are planning a **Christian Aid Quiz at Sawston Free Church on Saturday May 11 th at 7 pm.** Tickets will be available soon. Teams of four to six, and If you can't make a complete table let us know and we can help you find some other quizzers to join you!
A ploughman's meal will be served and bring your own non alcoholic drinks. Cost £8.00

Christian Aid service - May 12th at 3 pm at Sawston Free Church. All welcome.

Collections outside the Co-op in Sawston on Saturday May 18 from 0900 to 1200.

Thank you Mary, Jill and Richard

FLOWER ROTA

I am sure we are all very happy to see the church decorated with flowers, and, as you know, after the service the flowers are passed on to anyone in the church who needs support.

The Flower Rota is situated at the back of the church.

There are still lots of spaces on the rota for the next few months.

So please think about signing up for any dates that you would like to pay for flowers and discuss with Dawn any special requirements,. A member of the flower team will contact you nearer the date you have chosen.



28th April - Wendy Hocken

Many thanks,

Rosemary Harriss, Rosemary Livings, Dawn Haughton, Vivien Ford and Linda Moxon.

Are You Up For A Challenge?

The Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) has, like the URC, committed itself to work towards being at “net Zero” in carbon emissions by 2030. It’s an ambitious commitment. The MCB has set out in a fairly detailed way how it intends to achieve this in a document called “Action for Hope”. Aim number 7 relates to individual members and states the following:

Aim seven: For Methodist members/adherents to reduce their carbon footprints to one ton per year, particularly via the three key areas of energy, travel and diet (the biggest contributors to personal emissions). The average carbon footprint in the UK in 2020 is 4.85 tons per year. To reach a carbon footprint of less than 1 ton per year by 2030, would require a reduction in carbon footprint of 15% each year.

Though, when we talk about carbon reduction in the church, we often find ourselves focussed on our church buildings, research suggests that a much bigger carbon footprint comes from the way our members live their lives day by day.

Of course, if you are going to take measures year-by-year to reduce your carbon footprint, you need to have some way of measuring how you are doing. No carbon footprint calculator is perfect, but we must not let the perfect be the enemy of the “good enough”. If you weigh yourself on some slightly dodgy scales and then keep weighing yourself using the same dodgy scales, you will still have a good idea whether you are losing weight or not!

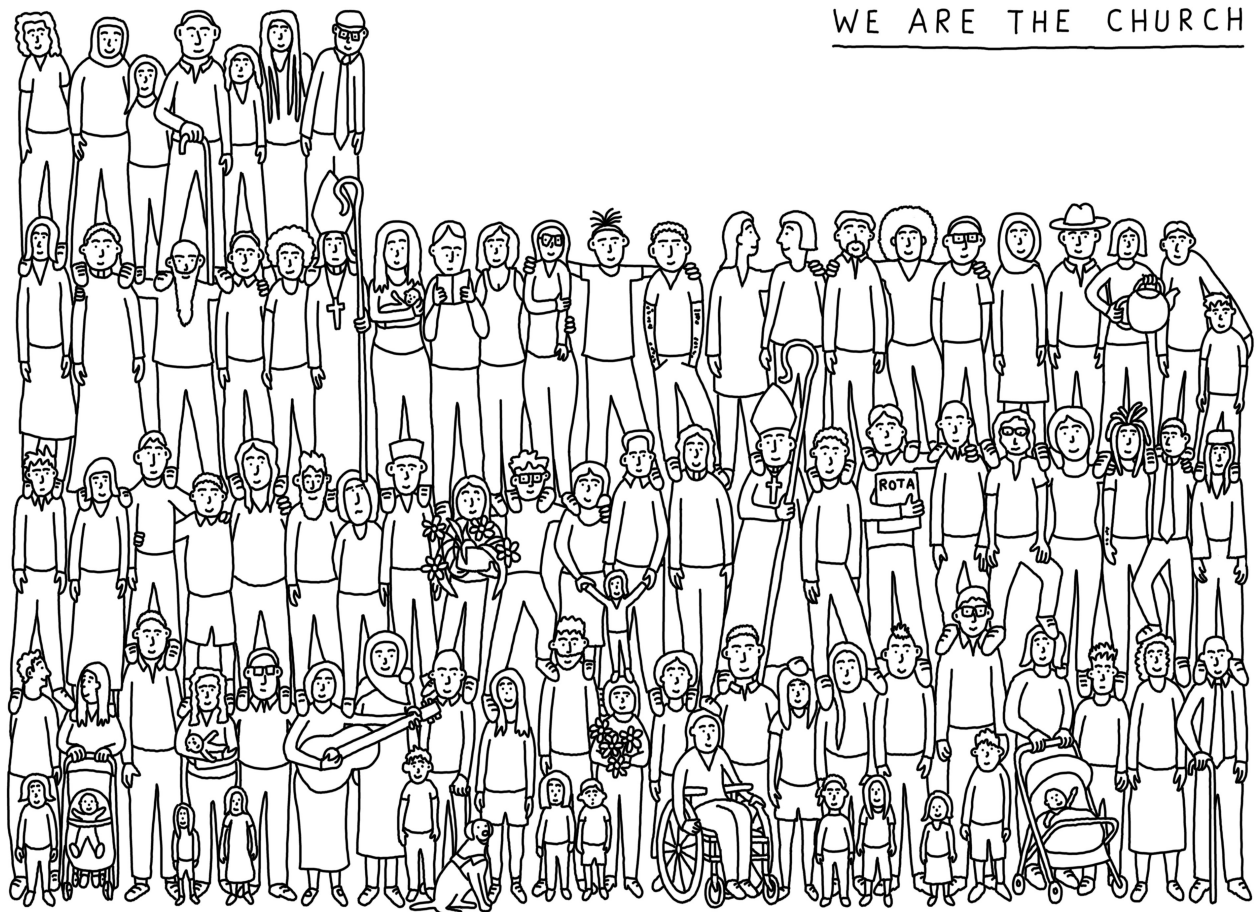
There are some VERY EASY carbon footprint calculators which demand a minimum of information from you and will offer you a measurement in a matter of minutes. The downside of these is that if you want to make small, but regular changes to your lifestyle and then measure your footprint again, the tool won’t be sophisticated enough to respond to those small changes. There are some VERY COMPLICATED calculators which ask you for granular detail about your lifestyle and you may think the effort of filling in all the information isn’t worth it!

You need a calculator which is detailed enough to respond to the changes you make but not one which will just cause you to give up the whole pursuit! So it SHOULD take some time and effort! Simply gathering the information can be an important learning tool for thinking about your carbon footprint.

EcoChurch recommend this one: <https://www.climatestewards.org/offset/>

We will be looking for a sample of people within the congregation who will commit themselves to measuring their carbon footprint using this tool each year for the next 6 years (to take us up to 2030) – we can then use that sample as representative of our congregation (in an approximate but not meaningless way!) The bigger the sample, the better!

Even if you don't want to be in the sample and commit yourself for 6 years, it will still be a good idea to do it and see if you can get your carbon footprint moving downwards towards 1 tonne! You might find the effort becomes addictive!



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New Mums

What? - Free drop-in time for new mothers and their young babies.

A safe, warm, welcoming place to meet, share experiences, form new friendships and build confidence.

Where? - Sawston Free Church, opposite The Greyhound, High Street, Sawston

When? - Wednesdays till 29th March. Please note changes to term-time - Thursdays from 18th April, 10 – 11.30 am.

Who? - Run by volunteers drawn from Sawston's church communities,
- linked to Sawston Child and Family Hub

"It was so lovely to come to a small group where I could lay my baby on the mats and just sit back and relax for an hour with other mums without a lot of noise and other children running around"

sawstonnewmums@gmail.com

posts on local Facebook pages

Please look out for our new posters around the village in April, and let Rosemary Heald know where you'd be happy to help distribute publicity - We have A5 posters and business cards to give to people we might see in the village.....



Taking The Bible Seriously Part Two

I wrote in the last edition of Contact a piece about what it might look like to take the bible seriously when we are talking about human sexuality. This was in response to members who were asking me in the context of the decision we will make about whether to register Sawston Free Church for same-sex marriages. Since then, several members have asked me about what the Bible actually says about marriage, which is the other half of the issue we are currently discussing. This brief overview is an attempt to do that.

The bible does mention marriage quite often, but it is true to say it offers a very mixed picture, and nothing much that looks like the kind of thing we might see as an ideal marriage relationship in the 21st Century. The Bible was written across a span of centuries and so reflects a very wide diversity of practice. Just to give a snapshot of what I mean:

Genesis 2:24 has what we might think we recognise – a man and a woman. Though, the woman is totally subordinate to her husband and is viewed as his property; interfaith marriages are forbidden; it is arranged by others rather than based on any idea of romantic love; and if the bride cannot prove her virginity, she should be stoned to death.

Man + wives + concubines model Abraham had 2 concubines, Solomon had 300.

Gen:38:6-10 tells us about “Levirate marriage” where a widow who had not borne a son is required to marry her brother-in-law and must submit sexually to him.

Deut 22:28-29 tells us quite clearly that a virgin who is raped **MUST** marry her rapist (the rapist must pay the victim’s father 50 shekels in property-loss damages.)

Numbers 38:1-13 and Deut 21:11-14 tell us that under Moses’ command the Israelites kill every man, woman and child except for the virgin girls who are taken as spoils of war. The girls must submit sexually to their new owners.

Polygamy is widespread in the Bible, Man+woman+woman+woman. Lamech had two wives, Esau had three, Jacob had 2, Ashur had 2, Gideon had many, Elkanah had 2, David had many, Solomon had 700, Rehoboam had 3, Abijah had 14...

Exodus 21:4 tells us that a slave owner could assign female slaves in marriage to his male slaves – they then must submit sexually to their new husbands.

Turning to the New Testament, the gospels say almost nothing about marriage apart from to say that divorce is only allowed in very limited circumstances. Paul says it's better to marry than to burn, which is hardly a ringing endorsement, and the first letter of Timothy says Bishops are an exception in being required to have only one wife. If you're not a bishop, then you can have more than one wife. I mention all of this not to make fun of the Bible, but to make clear that the one thing that I don't believe has any intellectual credibility is to argue that the Bible says marriage is always and only between one man and one woman, because it clearly doesn't. I would also say that the Bible presents a very clear view of women as the possession and tool of men, which is not a view that many of us would wish to subscribe to today.

Marriage and the teaching of the church

In one sense, there simply isn't a lot of teaching about marriage, and so this has to be teased out such as it is. For well over the first thousand years of Christianity, marriage may have been a name, but there was no ceremony and few rules or formalities. Where there were formal marriages, these were more often about strategic alliances and securing economic and political advantages. The couple's actual consent to marriage, which we'd regard as essential now, wasn't even relevant until 12th century. It was also not until the 12th century that the Roman Catholic Church began to speak of marriage as a sacrament.

The church universal didn't set out much at all about marriage until the first Book of Common Prayer, written by Thomas Cranmer, in 1549, which lists "the procreation of children" as the first among many purposes of marriage. This was, essentially, copied by other churches after that. Looking at current purposes of marriage, the current Church of England service speaks not of the birth of children, but the nurturing of children, and instead of being first in the list it has been reduced to sixth place in the list.

The current Methodist Worship Book speaks of the nurturing of children about halfway through the preface. The current United Reformed Church service book leaves any mention of children in brackets as a very clearly optional purpose of marriage.

In terms of the teaching of the church, the fairest that I can say is that this is has never been consistent, but changing significantly over time, and that the content of the teaching is not necessarily anything much to do with the Bible.

The teaching on marriage in the Bible and from the church is neither clear nor consistent over a long period. So where does this leave us? I think we are best placed to find answers in big themes of the Gospel: a good Creator, who begins to make all things new in the wake of fallenness and brokenness, One who is seen supremely in his Son, a God of grace, truth and love. When we

talk about taking the Bible seriously, we need to start from the position of God's unconditional love for all people and Jesus's habit of identifying himself with the most marginalised people of his day.

=====

April Prayers



*“Let there be love shared among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now Your love sweep this nation,
cause us, O Lord to arise:
give us a fresh understanding
of brotherly/sisterly love that is real;
let there be love shared among us,
let there be love”*

Dave Bilbrough
[ccl. 180039]

Please give thanks for everyone elected to serve our church for another year at the AGM.

Also please thanks for all those who quietly serve in many different ways, but are not always specifically named.

Please pray for world leaders and those in power, for wisdom, justice and righteousness.

The world needs the love of God and the peace of the Holy Spirit.

“Love is patient, love is kind.” 1 Corinthians 13:4

Anne Pegram

Please note that the views expressed in this article are those of the author, Michael Wilson, and not in any way representative of the views of Sawston Free Church.)

There is a political row going on over whether the Christian Churches are being naïve and are allowing themselves to be exploited in baptising adults (usually males) going through the immigration procedure who will subsequently argue that the fact of their baptism and their Christianity makes it dangerous for them to be deported back to their country of origin. The Guardian, which is usually hostile to the Christian Church, carried a surprisingly balanced report, probably because its loathing of the far right outstrips its loathing of Christianity.(1) The debate strays into dark and deeply unpleasant corners of the relationship between the ultra-conservative elements of Christianity in this country and far-right politics. Suella Braverman, on the basis of no evidence at all, has spoken luridly of baptisms of immigrants on an 'industrial scale'. For some reason, Matthew Firth, a former priest of the Church of England and now a rabid campaigner against it, was invited to address the Home Affairs Select Committee on the subject. He claimed the existence of a 'conveyor belt' of asylum baptisms (2)

All very unpleasant. From time to time, the relationship between church and state explodes out from the shadows of the arcane into emotive public rhetoric which knows nothing of calm reflection and has little interest in truth. It has happened here.

At times like these I realise with some surprise just how Protestant and Non-Conformist I am. I think that Lord Leslie Griffiths spoke much truth when he declared, a few years ago, that the Christian Church's institutional problems began when, in AD 381, the Emperor Theodosius the First issued the Edict of Thessalonica, recognising the Christianity encapsulated in the Nicene Creed as the state religion of the Empire. It seems to me that the most shameful incidents in history concerning Christianity are rooted in a murky relationship between organised religion and secular power. In this country, the mediaeval persecution of Jews, and the brutalities of the Reformation are obvious examples. Every time we in Sawston reappoint our eldership, I listen with wonder at the URC declaration of the limits of State interference in the spiritual life of the Church echoing down the centuries from the Reformation. But it is *not* mere history! The freedom of the Church to go about its business, no matter how inconvenient it might be to the State, lies at the heart of today's acrid quarrel.

Historically, in England and Wales, baptisms (like weddings) were collusions between church and state. Compulsory civil registration of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales started on 1 July 1837. Until then, the registration of births was conflated with

the recording of infant baptisms, and the records were kept in the local parish churches. A baptismal certificate was an identity document, proof of age, and proof of the right to claim all the benefits of British citizenship. To be Quaker, Baptist, Jewish, or Roman Catholic (and therefore not to have a CoE baptismal birth certificate) was to be at least slightly less than fully British and an object of suspicion. One can hear the subliminal echoes of this very British understanding of baptism going on in the present political quarrel.

The Church, say its critics, should be acting responsibly as an agent of the State and helping to clarify the implementation of government policy regarding immigration. That, they say, is precisely what the Established Church is for, and, by extension, it is what the other denominations are for too. The argument for this last is that the other denominations, in baptism as in marriage, in their being 'allowed' to baptise, are voluntarily signing themselves up as additional administrative organs of the state.

Church spokespersons (primarily, but not exclusively, Anglican bishops) are protesting that baptisms are church business, and nothing whatever to do with the State. We have birth certificates (not baptismal certificates) for state business, and where we do not have British birth certificates, we have the legal processes of the Home Office to decide the rights and privileges of persons in our midst not born British subjects. It is the Home Office, not the Church, that issues the appropriate documentation. The 1837 Act explicitly took that secular responsibility away from the churches. As the Bishop of Blackburn put it bluntly, 'This sounds to me like a pretty barefaced attempt to outsource responsibility for a failing asylum system to the Church.' And as the more diplomatic Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, put it, he was disappointed at the 'mischaracterisation of the role of churches and faith groups in the asylum system'.

In summary, it seems to me that there are two conversations going on here. One is a very old, and utterly legitimate conversation about the relationship between the Christian faith and citizenship. That conversation began in AD 381 (though you might say St Paul started it in Romans 13) and took a very British turn at the Reformation.

The other conversation is a confrontation with the dark and highly unpleasant passions that underlie a specific understanding of Britishness. It is deeply xenophobic. In confrontational, inflammatory language, it brands any voice daring to question its prejudices as lying, unpatriotic, potentially treasonable, and, in a uniquely British (and truly weird) sense, un-Christian. I believe that this toxic voice of the Christian Right is not only dangerous to our national wellbeing, but that it threatens the very soul of the church I love

(1) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/10/c-of-e-refutes-claims-of-conveyor-belt-of-asylum-seeker-fake-conversions>

(2) <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/83/home-affairs-committee/news/200317/home-office-minister-and-church-representatives-questioned-on-the-asylum-system-and-conversion-to-christianity/>

From The Minister's Desk

Thanks to Inform Magazine - for Methodist Churches in Royston, Haslingfield and Orwell

As we enter the season of spring, a time of new beginnings and renewal, I find myself reflecting on the concept of the Kingdom of God and the wisdom of my African ancestors. In this letter, I invite you to journey with me as I explore the rich tapestry of African cosmologies and their unique understanding of the divine, as well as the significance of this season in relation to the Lenten and Easter period.

One fascinating aspect that emerges from my exploration is the idea of Jesus as an Ancestor. This perspective invites me to consider the profound connection between the living and the dead, bridging the gap between past and present. By acknowledging Jesus as an Ancestor, Africans acknowledge the enduring legacy and wisdom that still guide us today.

As I explore further, I discover that our African ancestors did not refer to the divine as God in the same way we do in the western world. They used a variety of terms including words such as Musikavanhu, meaning creator, Mwari, meaning God. Africans embraced a philosophy that recognized the "Supreme Being" as manifesting in everything. This core belief permeated their cosmologies, shaping their understanding of the world and their place within it.

As I witness the blossoming of spring, I am reminded of the cyclical nature of life. The arrival of new growth and renewal mirrors the eternal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. In African cosmologies, this cycle is intricately woven into their understanding of the divine. They recognised that the Kingdom of God is not a distant, unattainable realm, but rather a living reality that exists within and around us.

This perspective challenges us to reimagine our relationship with the divine and the natural world. It calls us to embrace a sense of interconnectedness, to recognise that we are all part of a greater whole, and to honour the divine presence in all its

manifestations. As we observe the season of Lent, a time of reflection, repentance, and preparation for Easter, we can draw inspiration from African cosmologies in our spiritual journey. Lent is a period of introspection and self-reflection, inviting us to examine our lives and deepen our connection with the divine. We can use this time to reflect on the wisdom of African ancestors, their reverence for the interconnectedness of all life, and their recognition of the divine presence in every aspect of creation.

I invite you to draw inspiration from the wisdom of our African ancestors. May we cultivate a deep respect for the interconnectedness of all life and nurture a reverence for the divine that resides within and around us. In doing so, we can experience the Kingdom of God not as a distant dream, but as a tangible reality unfolding before our eyes.

As we journey Easter, may we remember the significance of this holy day, the celebration of Christ's resurrection and the triumph of life over death. May the Easter season bring joy, hope, and a renewed sense of faith. Maybe, we could reflect on the profound wisdom of African ancestors as we embrace the divine presence in all aspects of our lives during this Lenten and Easter season and beyond.

I invite you to take a moment to immerse yourself in the beauty of spring, to listen to the whispers of the wind, and to reflect upon the profound wisdom of our African ancestors. May their insights guide us in embracing the Kingdom of God and the divine presence in all aspects of our lives during this Lenten and Easter season and beyond.

Wishing you a spring filled with growth, renewal, and a deeper connection with the divine.

Yours in Solidarity

Revd Charity Nzegwu

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The Footprints Café



at

Sawston Free Church

The Footprints Café is a community cafe offering a wide range of reasonably priced Snacks and Meals together with Teas & Coffees, Cold drinks, Cakes and Pastries.

We are open Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm. Breakfasts are served until 11.30 am.

The Footprints Café is located at the back of Sawston Free Church. Car parking behind the church.

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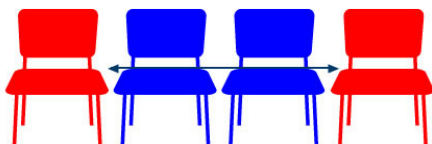
contact@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk

**We're back to normal
Every Sunday at 10.30am
but with a difference!**

You can now join us in church,
or from the comfort of your home using Zoom!

Email secretary@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk for more details

in person



online

