

CONTACT

May 2024



Volume 65 - Issue 5
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:**

05 May	10.30am : Morning Worship – David Lloyd 3.00-5pm: Messy Church
12 May	Sawston Fun Run 3.00pm : Worship – Rev Phil Nevard
19 May	10.30am : Morning Worship and Holy Communion – Rev Phil Nevard
26 May	10.30am : Go4th

The closing date for **June** Contact is **Friday 17th May**

**David Nunn is the editor, so please email your items
to anne.nunn@btinternet.com**

Minister		Tel
Rev Phil Nevard	12 Hinton Way, Gt Shelford, minister@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk	07814920187
Secretary:		
Mary Simuyandi	28 New Road, Sawston secretary@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk	837433
Elders: Sawston		
Jenny Karpuk	5 Prince William Way, Sawston	564121
Rosemary Livings	The Gables, 1a Granhams Road, Gt Shelford	845948
Anne Pegram	2 Brookfield close, Sawston	832597
Beryl Penny	April Lodge, 81 Brewery Road, Pampisford	833635
Mary Simuyandi	28 New Road, Sawston	837433
Joint Treasurers:		
Lynne Hays	Baggot Hall, Station Road, Harston	871800
Terry Penny	April Lodge, 81 Brewery Road, Pampisford	833635
Contact Editors		
David & Anne Nunn	10 London Road, Sawston Email: anne.nunn@btinternet.com	832913
Church Bookings	Tony Winstler, 6 Hurry's Close, Sawston winstler355@btinternet.com	837946
Church Website:	www.sawstonfreechurch.org.uk/	
Facebook page:	www.facebook.com/SawstonFreeChurch	

Contact

The monthly magazine of
Sawston Free Church United Reformed Methodist

Minister: Reverend Phil Nevard – 12 Hinton Way, Gt Shelford, Cambs CB22 5BE

Tel: 07814 920187 Email: minister@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk

www.sawstonfreechurch.org.uk,

www.facebook.com/SawstonFreeChurch

Dear Friends,

This week I found myself drawn in to an interview with a scientist talking about work he is involved with around coral reefs. News reports tell us that The Great Barrier Reef is in the midst of what could be its worst summer on record with a widespread and extreme coral bleaching event coming on top of floods, two cyclones and outbreaks of coral-eating starfish, according to an official Australian government report. The “summer snapshot” report released by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Institute of Marine Science said: “Compared with previous summers, cumulative impacts have been much higher this summer and a widespread bleaching event is still unfolding.”



The report says 39% of 1,080 individual reefs surveyed from the air had experienced either very high (61-90% coral cover bleached) or extreme (more than 90%) levels of bleaching. Such high levels had been observed on reefs in all three regions of the park, which is a world heritage-listed natural wonder, but the most heat stress had occurred in the south. The reef marine park, covering an area the size of Italy and including 3,000 individual reefs, is in the middle of a fifth mass bleaching in only eight years driven by global heating, with at least 10% of corals affected on 73% of reefs.

The interview was with a young scientist who found himself working alongside Dr Steve Simpson. Dr Steve Simpson was one of his heroes whilst studying climatology at university. Alongside others Dr Simpson did some groundbreaking research which allowed them to record the soundscape of coral reefs. Building on this work scientists have discovered that coral spores swim towards a healthy reef soundscape. They have been able to record this healthy coral reef soundscape and play it from bleached sections of reef. They have done it so successfully that healthy coral spores are now swimming towards these bleached reefs and repopulating them.

On a much smaller scale both Whittlesford parish church and Clare United Reformed Church have installations which play the sound of Swifts flying. This encourages passing swifts into nesting boxes.

It makes me wonder about Sawston Free Church. Not that I think we should be encouraging coral to grow around the edges but it makes me wonder what kind of “soundscape” our church is emitting. Politicians very often develop a negative kind of soundscape before an election, often known as “dog-whistle” politics, where they say things in a subtle, almost unheard way which will be picked up by certain sections of society without everyone really hearing it. It is designed so they can say things but deny saying them.

What if the “soundscape” we emitted was a positive one which could be heard by those who felt abandoned, lost, left out, excluded... a soundscape which spoke to them of hope, love, acceptance, joy, peace and grace? A soundscape which encouraged them to swim towards us and find a place to flourish?

That’s surely our Mission and our Goal.



Every Blessing,
Rev’d Phil Nevard
Phil

God Calling

Love and laugh.

Make your world the happier for your being in it.

Love and rejoice on the gray days.

There are wilderness days for My disciples as well as Mountains of Transfiguration, but on both it is duty, persistently, faithfully done, that tells.

Be gentle with all.

Try to see the heart I see, to know the pain and difficulty of the other life, that I know.

Try, before you interview anyone, or speak to anyone, to ask Me to act as Interpreter between you two.

Just live in the spirit of prayer.

In speaking to Me, you find soul-rest.

Simple tasks, faithfully done and persisted in, bring their own reward, and are mosaics being laid in the pavement of success.

Many blessings

Kate Leach

Redesigning The Way We Think About Pastoral Care

(Rev'd Phil Nevard)

At our March Church Meeting we agreed to move forward with a re-design of our Pastoral Care system.

I have been part of the church long enough now to have heard many people tell me how blessed they have been in the most difficult times to belong to such a genuinely loving and caring community as Sawston Free Church. It is a real strength in our church and a very real example of what it looks like when we take Jesus' call for us to "love one another as I have loved you" seriously.

The changes we are making seek to build on all of that rather than replace it. Our changes seek not to stop any of the forms of pastoral care that are already taking place, but to link them up in such a way that nobody (perhaps especially those who are new to the church) falls through the gaps.

For as long as anyone can remember we have based our pastoral care on the very traditional URC system of Elders Lists – where each Elder "looks after" a group of members. Over the years Elders have moved away from active service, but some have generously kept their lists, so we are now in a position where some of our members are looked after by a non-serving Elder and some by a serving Elder. Non-serving Elders don't attend Elders Meeting, so when it comes to the sharing of pastoral news, the people on their lists may fall through the gaps. Also, it takes some time before someone's name is added to a list, so newcomers (perhaps at a time when they are most in need of pastoral contact) may also fall through the gaps.

All of which is not to say it isn't working – as I said above, much of it is working very well, but maybe not in a joined-up way! Our new approach will try and recognise that most of the pastoral care done day-to-day isn't done through formal Elders lists, but by members who care for one another. So we will be putting in place a three-level system of pastoral care for the church.

Level One: Neighbourhood Care

Our first level recognises that pastoral care is not simply the responsibility of the Elders or the Minister, but of every member. If you like, we are a community which values the caring responsibility of all believers – all of us carry the responsibility to love one another, it's part of the commitment we make when we become members. So our first level of pastoral care involves everyone and is based around where people live. We will divide Sawston into four neighbourhoods and we will encourage members in each neighbourhood to care for one another. We will issue neighbourhood lists to accompany the church directory so that you know who is in your neighbourhood, and if anyone new comes to church it is likely they will already be living in one of our neighbourhoods! (People living outside the village, such as myself, will also be catered for!)

Pastoral care is just about where life goes wrong, it is also about celebrating together – rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. A phone call, a friendly face at the door, a lunch invitation, coffee together, perhaps an occasional neighbourhood garden party, praying regularly for one another by name... there are SO MANY ways pastoral care is offered. This kind of care can be offered by us all and is 99% of what church pastoral care is about. (And, yes! Of course we won't try and discourage anyone from being friends with someone in different neighbourhoods! The neighbourhoods are not boundaries to hem you in, but an expression of the responsibility that lies on your doorstep.)

Level Two: Elders List

The Elders will no longer have individual lists, but the Elders Meeting will maintain a list of members considered to be in need of additional care, and an Elder or a Pastoral Carer will be assigned to look after them for a time and the minister will be involved. There are all sorts of reasons why people might be in need of a little extra pastoral care, and people will move on and off this list as their situation changes. Elders are certainly not the only ones in the congregation who have gifts and skills for this ministry. We will, in due time, be looking for people who feel called to pastoral ministry and will offer some training and appropriate safeguarding measures.

Level Three: The Minister

The Minister will be involved in sections one and two but will play a more specific role in Level Three. The Elders will maintain a list of people who are considered to be in a life-situation where specific and regular pastoral care from the minister is a priority. This might be someone who has moved to a nursing home or is now housebound and would not see the Minister otherwise. The minister might offer regular home communion. This might be someone in end of life care or a family with a relative in end-of-life care. It might be someone who is going through some kind of faith-crisis. There obviously isn't an exhaustive list and some people on this list might well be a lot more long-term than those covered by Level Two. The lists in Levels two and three will be a matter purely for the Elders Meeting, they will never be published or disclosed elsewhere.

The principle at the heart of our re-design is that pastoral care is the responsibility of every member – it is who we have committed ourselves to be. Alongside that whole-church responsibility is a little bit of extra responsibility for Elders and Pastoral Carers and the Minister, but MOST of the day-to-day pastoral care in the life of the church will happen in and through our neighbourhoods. This is a pretty fair reflection of what already happens in our congregation in a quiet and dedicated way. Long may that continue to be the case!

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Sawston Fun Run. Sunday May 12th 10 am.

We will be holding a stall outside our church, as we have done before, to give out cakes and soft drinks to the runners and passers by.

We would love donations of cakes and biscuits. Please let Mary know if you can donate any cakes etc to help on our stall.

Thanks so much.

Mary. (Tel: 01223 837433)

May Prayers



Holy Spirit, we welcome you
Holy Spirit, we welcome you
Move amongst us with holy fire
As we lay aside all earthly desire
Hands reach out and hearts aspire
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome you

Holy Spirit, we welcome you
Holy Spirit, we welcome you
Let the breeze of your presence flow
That your children here might truly know
How to move in the spirit's flow
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome you

Holy Spirit, we welcome you
Holy Spirit, we welcome you
Please accomplish in me today
Some new work of loving grace I pray
Unreservedly have your way
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome you

Chris Bowater [ccl.180039]

Please pray for the Church Meeting on 8th May, that we listen to one another by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

On 12th May there is the Sawston Fun Run, please pray for all those taking part as the village comes together to raise money for deserving causes.

PENTECOST is on 19th May, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and the Church's birthday. It will be an invitation Sunday with Bring & Share lunch. We will also be celebrating Phil's "significant" birthday! Please pray for that special day.

This month please can you pray for everyone involved in the New Mums group as they now meet on Thursdays.

Anne Pegram



Big Day out 2024 online booking is now open!

Join us on the 8th of June at Trinity Park, Ipswich for a fun day out for all ages and a chance to meet up with other churches.

Come and Relax Enjoy the setting of Trinity Park and relax in the grounds.

Create Through a celebration art project and music, including drumming/percussion workshop, Drama and dance and the opportunity to sing in a live one-off production of 'Jonah Man Jazz'

Reflect Celebrating our Faith, hope and love in Action through Bible study, prayer spaces and storytelling. Exploring Faith in Action including through displays, conversation and all age activities.

Have fun In the grounds with a craft marquee, bouncy castle and slide, giant games, and fairground sideshows, including balloon modelling, face painting and bubble shows

Celebrate Worship together and eat together

Bookings online can be made via the Eastern Synod website or

<https://forms.office.com/e/6jwigUVLMB>

Kind regards,

*Marion
Office Administrator
Eastern Synod Office*



Drop in to our first synod roadshow of 2024. An informal space to raise questions, share answers, gather ideas and make connections.

Wednesday 15th May, Downing Place, Cambridge – 7.30 - 9pm
(Free parking at the Grand Arcade car park after 6pm)

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

Kind regards,
Marion
Office Administrator
Eastern Synod Office

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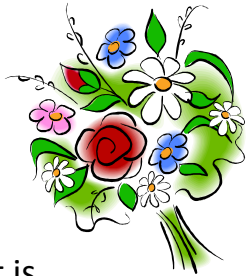
May Flower Rota

As you can see below, two people have put their names down for the May flowers. Please think if you are able to add your name too.

There are plenty of dates during the year when we need your help.

Most of us have had the pleasure of receiving the flowers at some point. It is considered part of our pastoral care for others.

- 5th Maggie
- 12th Kate
- 19th Available
- 26th Available



With thanks to everyone who has already signed up. If you need to know more detail, please contact one of the Flower Team.

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

Heavens' Special Child. By Edna Massimilla

A meeting was held quite far from earth
"It's time again for another birth,
Said the Angels to the Lord above,
"This special child will need much love."

"His progress may seem very slow
Accomplishments he may not show
And he'll require extra care
From the folks he will meet down there.

He may not run or laugh or play
His thoughts may seem quite far away
In many ways he won't adapt
And he will be known as handicapped.

So let's be careful where he is sent
We want his life to be content
Please Lord, find the parents who
Will do a special job for You.

They will not realise right away
The leading role they're asked to play
But with this child sent from above
Comes stronger faith and richer love

And soon they'll know the privilege given
In caring for this gift from Heaven
Their precious charge, so meek and mild,
Is Heaven's very special child."

Quiz Evening

with Ploughman's Supper

Saturday 11th May

7.00pm

at Sawston Free Church

High Street, Sawston

Teams of 6

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Mary tel: 01223 837433
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Is It “Mental Health Culture” Or Hunger That Has Gone Too Far?

By PAUL MORRISON (Policy advisor with particular responsibility for issues around the economy including poverty and inequality. Prior to working for the Methodist Church, a postdoctoral researcher at Imperial College studying viral disease and vaccine design.

“Mental health culture has gone too far, says Mel Stride” said a headline in the Daily Telegraph a few weeks ago. In the article below it the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions outlined his view that a significant factor in the post-pandemic increase in people not at work due to mental ill health was that many were “convincing themselves they have some kind of serious mental health condition as opposed to the normal anxieties of life”.

The interview did not mention that later that day the Department was going to announce the sharpest rise in poverty in 30 years, including an extraordinary 7.4 million people who struggle to source sufficient food – an increase of 50% over the previous year.

People like “Lucy” rarely feature in newspaper opinion columns – and certainly don’t get to write them. I met Lucy, whose name I have changed to protect her identity, in a spacious glass-fronted church vestibule which was set out as a welcoming café. Lucy had just had a conversation with one of the Trussell Trust foodbank volunteers and now she was waiting, coffee in hand, for her and her disabled mum’s 3-day supply of food. She told me a little about her mental health problems but that was not the focus of our conversation (we spent much too long talking about my recent birthday and her calling me old) – but it was part of her story. An unsurprising part of her story given the huge stresses and difficulties she dealt with every day. These were magnified by a large amount of unjustified guilt about needing to use the foodbank as well as shame about what she saw as not being able to cope. From the outside I saw her coping magnificently.

Lucy is unique and wonderful – but I have met a lot of Lucys in church halls around the country. Coping with difficult circumstances, mental health issues and shame is an all-too-common thread. But just as importantly there is a thread of humour, mutual support, and finding the energy to carry on.

Poverty, hunger and poor mental health are linked

Let’s start with the obvious: poverty and mental health issues are linked. Children from the poorest fifth of households by the age of 11 are four times more likely to have a serious mental health condition than the wealthiest. Adults in the most deprived areas have a 50% greater chance of depression than those in non-deprived areas, and suicide rates amongst the middle aged in those same deprived areas are more than double those in the least deprived. I could go on quoting study after study but put simply, if there are more people in Lucy’s position struggling to make ends meet, there will inevitably be more problems with mental health.

As the Secretary of State spoke about “mental health culture” – referring to a rise of 150,000 people out of work due to mental illness – he knew that his department was about to announce that more than 1 in 10 of the British population were living in families which were unsure that they would have enough to eat, an increase of 2.5 million in a single year. Given these numbers, it is a

testament to people's resilience, rather than an out of control "mental health culture", that the number held back by mental health issues is not greater.

Shifting responsibility onto those who are suffering

However, I fear what the Minister said was not a carefully considered position but instead it was just defensive politics. The economic inactivity numbers are not good, and the poverty numbers were about to be atrocious, so half-baked thoughts about a "mental health culture", that play well in the Daily Telegraph were most likely a useful way of getting out of a hole.

However, by equating mental health issues with not being able to cope with the normal anxieties of life the Minister both diminishes the level of suffering being experienced and asserts that the situations people find themselves in are normal and cope-able with. It is a self-serving assertion that shifts responsibility firmly away from government or society more broadly and onto the shoulders of those who are doing the suffering. These assertions also have the advantage of being impossible to conclusively prove or disprove.

Reinforcing blame and shame

The thing that most angered me about Mel Stride's statement was not that it played into inaccurate prejudices that the public have about people struggling with mental health problems (which it absolutely does). What angered me most was that it played into the unjustified prejudices that people who have mental health problems often have about themselves.

I will never forget speaking with a man in Glasgow who had been sanctioned – had his benefits removed – for 9 months. He began his story of hunger, followed by homelessness and understandable long-term mental health issues with the phrase "I was a bit stupid". What he had done to be sanctioned was not attend an interview because, as a tribunal later confirmed, he hadn't been told about it – yet just like Lucy, he still instinctively found fault in himself.

Giving mental health a context

When I meet people like Lucy, who are experiencing real and understandable mental distress, I feel that the way that we talk about mental health leads us to inadvertently strip away important context. We rightly want to relieve any person's distress with whatever tools we have – including medical treatment. But that process also encourages us to see the person as ill, and not see the ordinary person who has been damaged by difficult circumstances.

It is truly perverse that while someone like Lucy will have no difficulty getting regular antidepressant pills, it is a distant pipedream that her damaging context might be improved by enabling her to source decent food, shelter, and support for her disabled mum.

Yes, Lucy may need treatment but that cannot deal with the key injustice at the heart of this situation – it simply makes it more liveable with. Good and important in the short term but anaesthetising us all to the underlying injustices in the long term.

The mental health culture has not gone far enough

I agree with Mel Stride that it is good we are more open about mental health problems. While the Minister's objection was that we have gone too far, mine is that it has not gone far enough.

Rising mental ill health is a problem that has steadily increased across the population for over 30 years, focused on the young and the least well off, but touching all parts of society. The primary response however has been to deal with sick individuals, without systematically linking this to people's circumstances or reflecting more broadly on why our society has become a mentally less healthy place.

Very recently, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has produced a book highlighting the role of the mobile phone in mental health which has been met with enthusiasm. The more detailed arguments have been less welcome – that phones are a potent conduit for social pressures that have been increasing for some time. Social pressures that become more prevalent throughout society as poverty and especially inequality increases. This helps explain the society wide increases in mental illness beginning before the invention of the mobile phone that have been focussed on the least well off. The problem is too complex to do justice to here – but the tabloid scapegoat of mobile phones is not credible.

A good mental health culture that went far enough would be one that recognises that society-wide increases in mental distress are conveying important information.

Information that tells us about how changes in society are experienced by people and how we can make our communities mentally safer and more nurturing places to be.

What next?

Poverty causes mental distress, and the more there is, the more mental illness ensues. It can be tackled if there is political will to do so. The Let's End Poverty campaign is seeking to put poverty at the heart of the next general election campaign, where it needs to be if the next government – whoever wins power – is to make the transformative changes that are needed to reduce poverty and inequality in the UK.

But lots of what is next is to continue what churches are already doing so well. Lucy was at the foodbank because she needed food – but what she gets is much more. People listen to her story and share jokes. They tell her she is valuable; she is doing well; she is not a failure – in short, they treat her as the loved image of God she is. I truly believe that is where God is to be found at work, and it is happening in church halls up and down the country.

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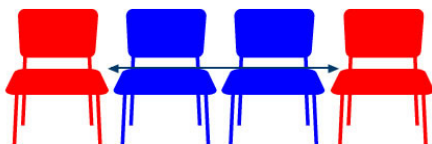
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