

C O N T A C T

March 2024



L e n t

Volume 65 - Issue 3
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:

03 Mar	10.30am : Morning Worship – Faith Paulding 3.00pm – 5.00pm – Messy Church
10 Mar	10.30am: Holy Communion & Mothering Sunday – Rev Phil Nevard
17 Mar	10.30am : Morning Worship – David Lloyd
24 Mar	10.30am : Go4th
28 Mar	7.00pm : Maundy Thursday –Holy Communion
29 Mar	10.00am : Good Friday – Walk of Witness, ending at St Mary's for hot drinks and hot cross buns, children's activities. 7.00pm : Reflective Service
31 Mar	10.30am : Easter Sunday Holy Communion & Blossoming of the Cross – Rev Phil Nevard

The closing date for April Contact is Friday 22nd March

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

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The monthly magazine of
Sawston Free Church United Reformed Methodist

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Dear Friends,

As a church we are trying to engage in a process through which we understand better who we are as a church and how we live that out. What is often described as “personality” or “character” in a person is often helpfully summed up by the word “culture” in an organisation. All organisations have a “culture” – it’s shorthand for who we are, what we do, how we do things and how we behave towards others.



We are trying to mould the culture of our church so that we recognisably have a culture of prayer, welcome, invitation, hospitality, and inclusion. It’s not enough simply to SAY those things – we must BE those things; we must LIVE those things.

In most encounters we read of that people had with Jesus in the gospels, there is a challenge to go further, to push beyond what is easy towards what is extraordinary. People did not generally come away from an encounter with Jesus thinking that everything was fine, and they didn’t need step up and change. It’s the same for churches. If we offer our church culture to Jesus, he will challenge us to go further – beyond what we may be comfortable with:

- He will challenge us not only to be a collection of people, many of whom sometimes remember to pray, but to be a church community where prayer is at the heart of everything.
- He will challenge us not only to welcome people at the door as they arrive by remembering to say hello, but to be a church community where strangers are not strangers for very long.
- He will challenge us to be hospitable not only with coffee and biscuits after worship on a Sunday, but also in our homes and on every other day of the week too.
- He will challenge us both only to invite those we like and those we think might easily fit in, but to invite any and all and be prepared to change our ways to help them feel comfortable.

- He will challenge when we say we are inclusive, not only to include those we think we might be able to accept at a push, but to seek to reflect the culture of the Kingdom of God where nobody is excluded.

As you receive this it is still Lent – a season in the church calendar where we are encouraged to ask that question – as individuals: who am I? how Christlike is my character and my day-to-day living? I would encourage you also to use it as a time of reflection on who we are as a church community? How well does our church culture truly reflect the culture of the Kingdom of God? Are we prepared for the challenge and perhaps discomfort that moulding such a culture might bring? Change is always discomfoting. This is why, at the heart of the season of Lent is the story of Jesus with an uncomfortable and discomfoting time in the wilderness wrestling with the same questions – who was he going to be and how would he live out his calling?



Every Blessing,

Rev'd Phil Nevard

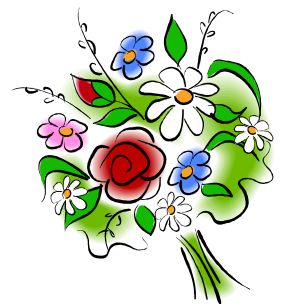
Phil

March Flower Rota

It is pleasing to see that we have a full rota for this month. If you would like to be included on future months, please mention it to any of the Flower team who will arrange them for you. Of course we are always happy for anyone to arrange their own flowers just let us know.

The flowers will always be given away to someone in need of a Thank you or as support from the Church.

3 March	Sue Sisk
10 March	Mothering Sunday
17 March	Rosemary Livings
24 March	Jill Legg
31 March	Easter Sunday



Many thanks,

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

World Day of Prayer 2024

A Service is being held at St Mary's church at 2pm on Friday March 1st with all the churches in Sawston taking part.



On 1 March 2024, many churches around the UK will be holding a World Day of Prayer Service. This year's theme is *"I beg you, bear with one another in love"*

This year the Christian Women of Palestine are calling us to connect with the land from where Jesus came; where he was born, ministered and died – and from where our faith began and is rooted.

"Despite living in an area of the world where there is ongoing conflict and the future is uncertain, the women of Palestine are sharing with love a reminder that they are there, and they want to give hope to everyone. The theme 'bear with one another in love' seems very appropriate for these women who will not give up witnessing the love of Jesus Christ."

The Palestinian Christian women who wrote this worship service invite us to pray for peace, justice and freedom of religion and movement, asking us to pray for women, refugees, the sick, dying and grieving.

A Palestinian Christian Nurse, Dina Nasser, said: "I hope on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer, as we pray for peace and justice on earth, we remember that taking a stand for justice does not allow us the luxury of choice. It is a moral stand that we should uphold for all the oppressed in this world, be they Palestinians, Syrians, Yemenis or Ukrainians. How can we remain silent and only speak up when it is acceptable to do so? Please take action; we have heard enough statements of concern!"

(From the Churches Together website)

God Calling

Fruit of joy

You have to hush the heart and bid all your senses be still before you can be attuned to receive Heaven's music.

Your five senses are your means of communication with the material world, the links between your real Spirit-Life and the material manifestation around you, but you must sever all connection with them, when you wish to hold Spirit-communication. They will hinder, not help.

See the good in everybody. Love the good in them. See your unworthiness compared with their worth.

Love, laugh makes the world, your little world, happy.

As the ripples caused by a flung stone stir the surface of a whole pond, so your joy-making shall spread in ever widening circles, beyond all your knowledge, all anticipation. Joy in Me. Joy is eternal.

Centuries after, it is still bearing Joy's precious fruit.

Light a Candle

There was a day, when a match and a candle met.

The match said to the candle. "I've got instructions to kindle you".

"Oh, don't do that", the candle replied. "because if you kindle me I'll burn and burning hurts".

"But do you want then to remain all your life hard and cold?" The match asked.

"You are a candle and your task and destiny is to get kindled and spread light".

"But if you kindle me, I will burn down and then I'm gone and nothing is left", the candle answered.

"Look" said the match "I can give just a little bit of light and only for a short time and my destiny is fulfilled. But I can be the ignition to spark and kindle you and your flame will burn warm and bright for a long time.

You can give warmth and spread light for a long time, that's your true destiny. If you have burnt down and gone, it's not so, that nothing is left, but all the light and warmth, that you have given to the world will stay there forever."

After these words the candle bowed it's wick and said to the match. "PLEASE KINDLE ME'

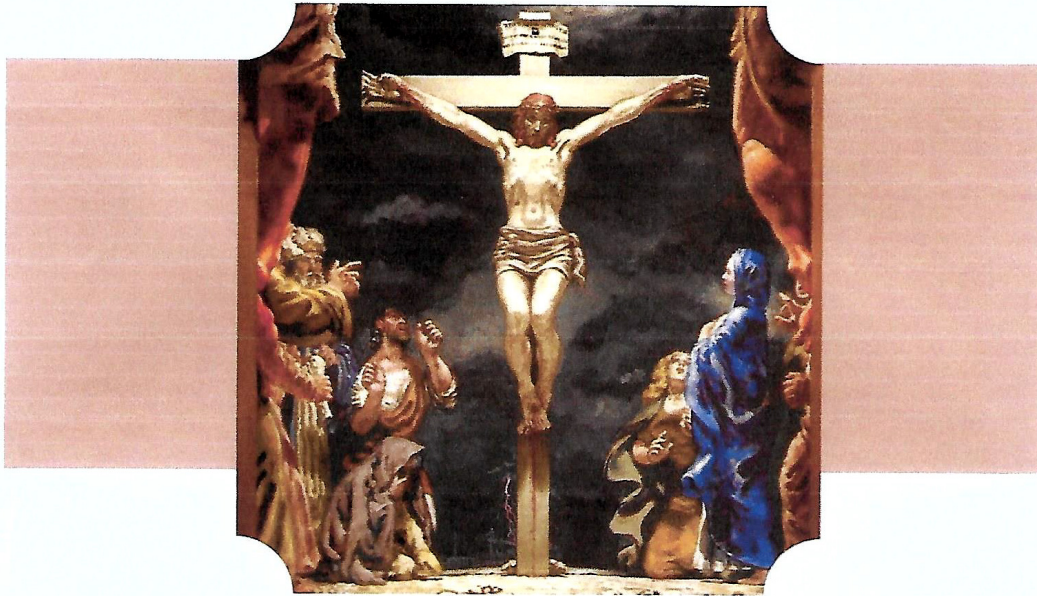
Author unknown

Many blessings

Kate Leach

Fulbourn URC

Fulbourn URC would like to invite members from your churches to Stainer's Crucifixion on Sunday 24th March at 4.30pm.



Stainer's 'Crucifixion'

with audience participation

Cambridge Voices,
directed by Ian de Massini

Sunday 24th March
4.30pm - 5.30pm

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for
"Talking in Tune"*

Isabel McCubbin

With Thanks:

The family of **Betty Cleveland** would like to thank everyone at Sawston Free Church and Footprints Café for their contributions to Betty's funeral on 6th February.

Her Church Family was very important to her and it was lovely to see so many people come to share memories of her life. We were very touched by the tributes from members of the Church.

Other family and friends have said to us how welcoming church members were. So thank you for making the day special.

Love

Sally, Peter, Sarah, David, Matthew, Megan

In looking through mum's and dad's photographs we have come across a few which we would thought may be of interest to the wider Church Community.





Taking The Bible Seriously

Since I proposed at our January Church Meeting that sometime this year we should take seriously the invitation from The Methodist Conference and the URC General Assembly to make our own local church decision whether or not to become a church where same-sex marriages are celebrated, several church members have asked my opinion about a particular issue: “If we agree to same-sex marriage, does that mean we are not taking the Bible seriously?”

I know this is a serious and genuine concern, and it may be a concern to more people than have actually voiced it to me, so I thought it might help if I reproduced some of the things I have said to members in response.

I think people ask me this because they feel torn. Most of us know someone who is gay, often in our own family, who we dearly love and we cannot join in the condemnation, but we also take our Christian Faith seriously and are troubled when we hear voices telling us that the bible would condemn them.

A magazine article doesn't allow for a detailed biblical analysis, but a good place to start is to understand that the Biblical world across its span of thousands of years knew nothing of what we NOW describe as a same-sex marriage. Biblical writers could no more write about same-sex marriage, or faithful same-sex relationships between consenting adults as they could write about mobile phones or hybrid cars. That's not to say there were no gay people, but simply to say that what we are talking about in the 21st Century simply was not a category of society, thought or discussion in those days.

If we are to take the bible seriously, then there are several things we will do to be careful when reading it:

- We will take care to understand the culture in which it was written
- We will take care to place individual verses in the context they occur
- We will take care to make a reasoned and sensible conclusion about what the text is actually saying and what it is not saying

I take the bible very seriously. I have devoted the greater part of my 60yrs of life to studying it, wrestling with it, reading it, praying with it and trying to let it guide my path – even through New Testament Greek lessons at Mansfield College!

The truth is, there is a tiny handful of verses that are the verses always used when any churchy discussion of same-sex marriage happens, so I hope it might help if I just lay out some of the bare bones of what it might look like if we took those verses seriously.

1. Genesis 19:1-38, The story of Sodom and Gomorrah

It might help to go back and read this story... what you THINK the story is and what the story ACTUALLY is might not match! Lot has two visitors (who we know to be angels or messengers of God). A huge crowd of all the men in the city gather and demands that Lot sends the visitors out so that they can gang-rape them. Lot refuses to do so and offers his daughters to be gang-raped instead (yes – really!). For Lot, hospitality, “the protection of my roof” was his prime duty above all else. The angels rescue Lot and his family and the city of Sodom is destroyed.

It's quite a stretch to make this a story about condemnation of same-sex marriage or homosexuality. This crowd of all the men in the city (so – heterosexuals!) gathers to

humiliate strangers/foreigners by demanding to gang-rape them. But we don't really need to do the work here because in several places the Bible tells us exactly what the sin of Sodom was, and it's not about sex or bottoms. In Isaiah 1:10-17 it is injustice, not rescuing the oppressed, defending the orphan, pleading for the widow. In Jeremiah 23:14 it is adultery. In Ezekiel 16:48-49 it is the sin of not aiding the "poor and needy." In Zephaniah 2:8-11 the sin is bullying, boasting and pride. In the Wisdom of Solomon it is "the bitter hatred of strangers." According to the Bible, the sin of Sodom (or "sodomy") is not about sex at all.

2. Leviticus 18:22 (also repeated in Lev 20:13)

The Levitical Law says when "a man lies with a male as with a woman" it is an "abomination". I find that some Christians really like this word "abomination" – some have even told me that my children are "an abomination". It's probably important that we understand it. This is a passage about purity laws. Lots of things are defined as "abominations" – eating shellfish, wearing mixed fabrics (go and check your wardrobe), touching a woman after she has given birth. Yes – to hug your wife after she has delivered a beautiful baby – or to kiss her joyfully – is (according to these purity laws) "an abomination". Some might say to take the bible seriously, you'd have to refuse to touch her... but I don't think that takes the bible seriously at all.

You could write a lot about the purity code and why – at the time – these things seemed like sensible things to do to distinguish the people of Israel from their Canaanite neighbours, this was their purpose. Lying with a male as with a woman probably refers to some kind of Canaanite temple prostitute practise. Back then the people of Israel were a small nation desperate for growth in population. They believed that sperm contained everything necessary for life. A woman was just the incubator! So ANY sexual activity (famously, masturbation would get the same biblical rebuke) which wasted sperm by not leading to the possibility of procreation, was an abomination.

Of course, Jesus famously rejected chunks of this holiness code often! In the story of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite (obeying the holiness code by not touching what they thought might be a dead body before leading worship) are portrayed as the baddies! Jesus heals on the sabbath, has his disciples pluck corn on the sabbath, touches people with leprosy and gets very close to a woman with menstrual bleeding. He also refuses to stone a woman caught in adultery – which Leviticus instructs him to do. It's not taking the bible seriously to pick one clause out of the list, misinterpret it to apply to same-sex marriage and ignore all of the others.

3. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10

*9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor sexual perverts
10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,

10 immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine...

The word “homosexual” was never used in bibles until 1946 when the RSV came out. They chose to translate the words “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai” with the word “homosexual”. In German translations at the time it was translated as “boy molesters” (knabenschänder). In 1971, the RSV new edition removed it and replaced it with “sexual perverts”, but a whole generation had grown up with the word “homosexual” in there, and it made an impact.

Malakoi means “soft” and is used in various ways and “arsenokoitai” is notoriously hard to translate because it is only used twice and is probably a word made up by Paul. The consensus of biblical scholarship agrees with those German translations, that Paul is referring to pederasty, the (then) accepted cultural practice of older heterosexual men becoming “mentors” for adolescent boy slaves for sexual gratification. In much the same way as the sexual abuse of young men by older men in men’s prisons isn’t really about homosexuality but about power and abuse, this is about wealthy powerful heterosexual men abusing others for sexual gratification. Sexuality was understood differently then. If you were the young boy you were probably the “passive” partner – the one being penetrated. In that case you basically counted as a woman as the understanding was very much that the “active” partner was the male and the “passive” partner was female. It’s probable that this is what Paul means when he uses the word “malakoi” – or “soft”.

If you were to take these verses seriously, you’d probably be moved to campaign against sex-trafficking or sexual abuse. Whatever the precise details were in Corinth and Ephesus, Paul was not writing about consenting adults in committed homosexual relationships.

4. Romans 1:25-27

Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

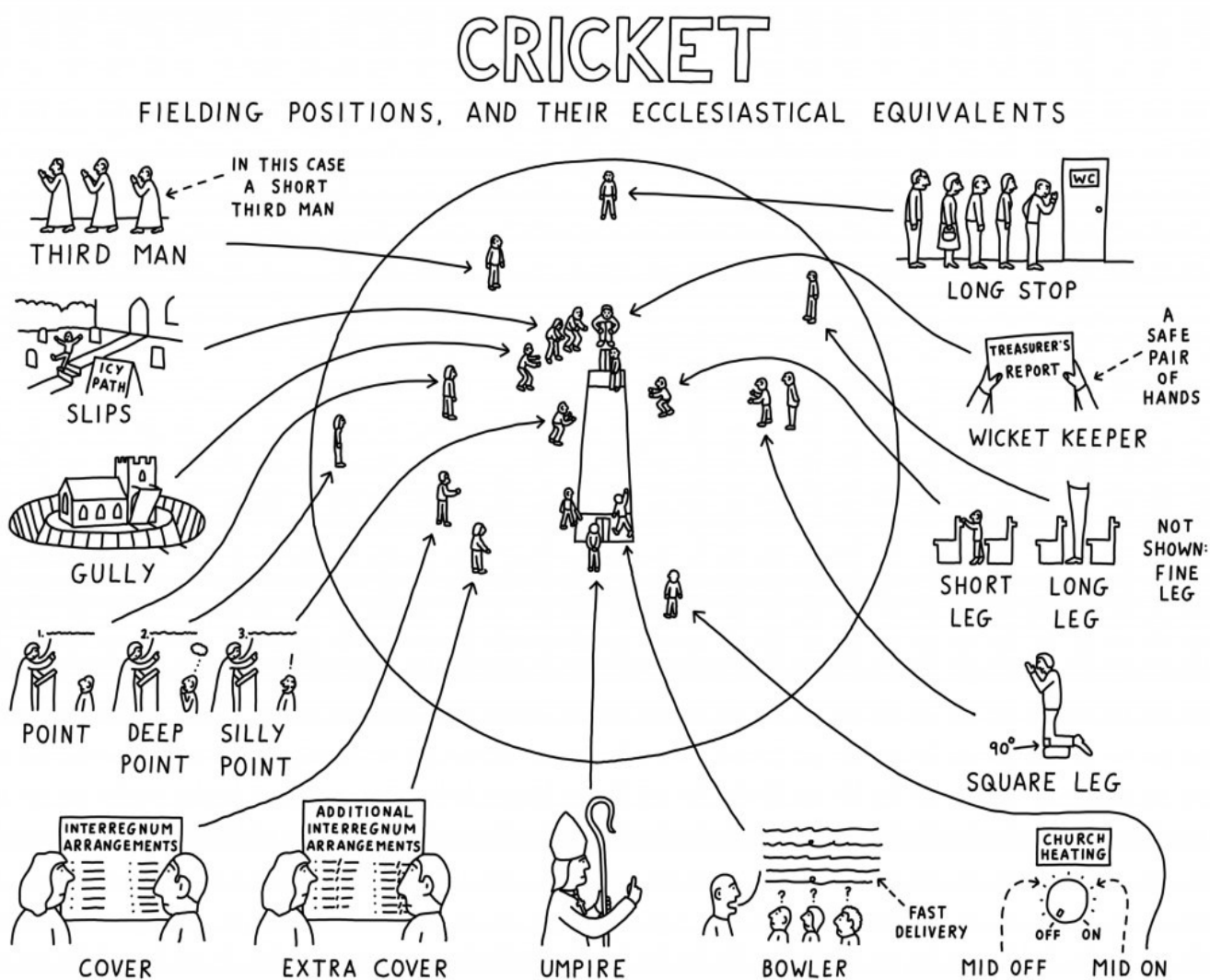
These verses are slightly different to the others in that they also feature sexual activity between women. A lot is made of Paul’s use of the words “natural” and “un-natural”. Our modern understandings of those words may lead us to think that Paul is saying that a particular type of sexual activity is against the entire natural order and therefore wrong by definition, as if it is written into the universal code. But when we look at where else Paul uses these words, he also describes men having long hair as “un-natural” using the same word. Elsewhere he uses the same word to describe the amazing way God brings together Jews and Gentiles – so a positive thing! What he means is “unconventional” – which is a neutral word. If something is unconventional it could be bad or it could be good.

Paul’s concern here is out-of-control sexual lust, such that heterosexual men and women seek to satisfy their excessive lust in unconventional ways. It’s not a diatribe against what we understand by same-sex marriage or committed, loving same-sex marriages, it’s a diatribe against people using other people to satisfy their selfish lust. In biblical times, if you needed to satisfy lust outside of marriage, you didn’t have so many options given what might happen to adulterers! So you did it in what was culturally seen as a socially acceptable way – pederasty or prostitution for men and we’re not exactly sure what Paul is

describing with women but it's likely it might be some kind of Temple cult prostitution. Neither of these things counted as adultery in Romano-Greco culture. These verses are part of Paul's broader indictment against idolatry and excessive, self-centred lust that is driven by desire to "consume" and abuse rather than to love and to serve.

All things considered, it is important to remember that throughout church history, new information about people and the world have frequently led Christians to reconsider their beliefs – slavery, apartheid, the exclusion of women, witch-burning, crusades... (there's a long list!) This need not be a reason to distrust or abandon Scripture, but rather should serve as an invitation to wrestle with the contexts of the biblical writers and our own lived experiences. THIS is to take the bible seriously.

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The Minister's Desk

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

In this New Year we are presented with a precious opportunity to start afresh. It is a time to reflect on the past, but also to look forward with hopeful anticipation. The New Year invites us to be watchful, to open our eyes and hearts to what God is doing around us.

In this new season, God is constantly at work, bringing forth new things and orchestrating divine moments that we may not have been sensitive to or aware of before. As we enter this year, we are invited to strive to be more attuned to God's voice, leading and presence, to be watchful and discerning, so that we may recognise the signs of God's movement in our lives and in our community.

God invites us to join in the continuing and challenging work of the kingdom. We are called to be active participants in the kingdom-building activities. As we commit ourselves at the beginning of this year, and as we have renewed our commitment through the Covenant Services together, let us also renew our commitment to the work of the kingdom. Let us offer our time, our gifts, and graces, as well as our resources to serve God wholeheartedly and to extend His love and grace to those around us.

As we continue this discipleship journey together, may we be united in our passion for God's kingdom. Let us encourage one another, spur one another on, and hold each other accountable. Together, we can make a lasting impact on our community and bring glory to God.

In this New Year, may we embrace the opportunities for growth, transformation, and renewal, seeking God's guidance and wisdom as we navigate the path ahead. May we be open to God's leading and be sensitive to the prompting of the Spirit, so that we may step into the new things God has in store for us.

Friends, let us remember that God is faithful, journeying alongside us every step of the way, guiding, and empowering us. May God's presence be our source of strength and inspiration as we journey through this year together.

Wishing you a blessed and fulfilling year, filled with the joy of knowing and serving our faithful God.

*Yours in Solidarity,
Charity*

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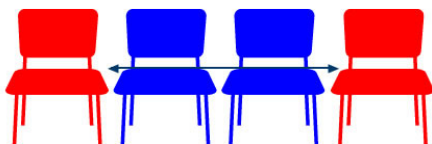
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at

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.

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