CONTACT

December 2025









Volume 66 - Issue 12 Sawston Free Church

Churches Services and Dates for Your Diary

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



Sun 07 Dec 10.30am : Morning Worship – Jim Dalgleish

03.00pm: Messy Christingle.....All are welcome

Tues 09 Dec 06.00pm: Brigades Carol Service

Morning Worship SFC – Tess Maddin

Sun 14 Dec 10.30am : Holy Communion

& Junior Church Nativity - Phil Nevard

Sun 21 Dec 10.30am : Lego Service – Phil Nevard Wed 24 Dec 05.00pm : Pyjama Service – Phil Nevard

Thurs 25 Dec 10.00am: Christmas Day Service – Phil Nevard

Sun 28 Dec 10.30am : Go4th





The closing date for January Contact is Monday 29th December

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The monthly magazine of Sawston Free Church United Reformed Methodist

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Dear Friends,

December always seems to arrive at full tilt, doesn't it? One moment we're kicking leaves around the garden, and the next we're wondering where we stored the Christmas lights and whether they'll behave this year. (They won't.)



It's easy to feel that Christmas needs to be big to be meaningful—big gatherings, big meals, big expectations, big emotions. And yet the heart of the Christmas story is surprisingly small. A small town, a small stable, a small family doing their best with

what they had. A newborn hand curling around Mary's finger. A quiet light in a dark sky.

This year I've been thinking about the *small things* that make a difference.

A neighbour knocking to check someone's okay.

A card sent with a few honest words of gratitude.

A cup of tea shared when the day feels heavy.

Small kindnesses—tiny glimmers of grace—they shine brighter than we realise.

Christian faith has always insisted that God is found in the smallness. In the whispered prayer, not the shout; in the moment of kindness, not the fanfare. God comes to us not as a grand idea but as Emmanuel—love with a human face, love that fits into our hands.

So this December, let's keep an eye out for the little gifts. A smile, a pause, a candle, a warm welcome. They are small, yes—but they are the shape of Christmas all the same.

May this season gift you not perfection, but small moments of peace that gently accumulate into joy.

With love and blessings this Advent & Christmas,

Rev'd Phil Nevard

Phil

Rooms to Let

Most readers of this article will know very well that the Free Church has several rooms in addition to the "Sanctuary" where services are conducted.

These rooms are used for church-related activities. For example Brigades use these for their regular Tuesday meetings and the occasional weekend sleepover.

The Go4th music group have rehearsals every Friday evening. Also, there are several children's activities such as Messy Church and the annual Holiday Club.

Of course the church is also used for Weddings and Funerals – often supported by Anj's excellent catering from Footprints café.

In addition, several of the rooms are available to let, and these are used as a valuable benefit to the local community.

Some of the activities are held weekly, and others on a "ad hoc" basis – and here is a summary of the main events.

Once a month, on Friday mornings there is a craft group who get together in the back hall for a coffee and chat and make bags for charity "Morsbags" Their leader, Catherine Tresgaskes writes..

"Our group first started making Morsbags back in the Spring of 2015, so we have been running now for more than 10 years! The Greener Sawston group was discussing alternatives to plastic bags - it was around the time that charges were being discussed for single use plastic bags - and I had come across the Morsbag movement while living and working in Leicester a few years before.

I made my first bag (which I still have) out of some curtain fabric that I rescued out of a skip when my neighbours house was being emptied, spent a little time visiting other craft groups in the village to drum up additional support for the project and our regular meetings (usually the last Friday of the month) started at the end of May 2015.

We have interacted with hundreds of people over the years - both through our regular meetings and via our pop-up bag making sessions. We have worked with OWL, Bellbird Primary School, Sawston library and Challis garden to name but a few. Our sessions are inclusive and anyone* can come and participate. Many people who thought they 'could not sew' have made a fabulous bag with our members support and positive encouragement.

Over the years we have made thousands of bags to give away - I stopped counting exact numbers at just under three thousand bags and that was a few years ago - I reckon we must be up to five thousand or more by now! We give our bags away at various places in and around the village including events at Challis Garden, outside the Coop, Marys Green Grocers, the library, Green Weigh, JHC and more. We also suggest using a Morsbag instead of wrapping paper for presents - two gifts in one, what is not to like? - and in this way our bags have travelled round the world even reaching Australia.

The ethos of Morsbags is that everything about them is free - the fabric is donated, people give their time, and the bags are given away for free making them non-exclusive. Some people like to give a donation - and with the money we have received we have given a small amount back to the Free Church and also to Challis Garden in Sawston. We have been supported the whole way through the project by the Free Church - without this support Greener Sawston Morsbag Group would not exist, so Thank You very much. "

Also on Fridays, Jackie Green leads weekly musical/dance groups for young children in the large Side Hall. Jackie writes....

"Musical Bumps is an established part of the week at Sawston Free Church, with classes for each age group every Friday in the hall. Here is a bit of the theory behind the fun;

Musical Bumps classes are inspired by the principles of Hungarian musician Zoltan Kodaly. He said that music education should start nine months before the birth of the mother! Parents can come along with brand new babies but new children are welcome at any stage. It's crucial that children learn in a playful way, making their education both meaningful, memorable and enjoyable. The repertoire is drawn from traditional songs and rhymes from around the world. Songs are simple, easy for children to sing and with exciting activities to accompany them. Experts agree that music benefits all areas of learning and that children who attend music classes from a young age have increased confidence, greater language skills and are flexible, adaptable learners by the time they start school.

Mums, Dads, grandparents and carers are welcome at Musical Bumps with their children/grandchildren - a great way to learn and share new skills together and there's always time to get to know other families at the class.

The classes are age-specific and educationally progressive, but as babies and children develop at varying rates, the age groups are suggestions and are flexible to suit each child.

Babies - Peaceful time with new babies and up to a year learning rocking songs, rhymes and lullabies in a clam environment.

- 1+ On the move! Songs for counting, songs that rhyme, action songs and singing games with puppets and instruments.
- 2+ Gently structured with an emphasis on developing musical and social skills through play. Learning to listen, to take turns and even to tidy up.
- 3+ (Preschool) Exciting props, percussion and puppets help children to find their singing voices and learn about rhythm and other musical concepts. These classes are themed with topics linked to early years curriculum."

The Side Hall is also used for a fitness class on Mondays. Class leader Marlene Sharpe-Westwood writes

"The fitness class is on Mondays, 1.45pm to 2.45pm, held in the Free Church Hall.

The class is an Exercise to Music class. This fitness class would help increase and maintain a person's cardiovascular fitness, strength, stamina and flexibility.

Music from all genres is used to motivate the class helping with the pace of each section. From faster music for the Cardio section to slower beats for the strength training.

Resistance bands for strength training are encouraged as well as using body weight.

The people who would mainly benefit from this class would be the person wanting to get back into fitness, like an active retired person or someone younger wanting to regain their fitness due to not having the time or motivation.

The instructor is experienced and qualified to adapt any part of the class to suit individual needs and is available to talk through any concerns about the class.

Call Marlene Sharpe- Westwood 01223 571431 / heartbeatfitness@ntlworld.com" to check that space is available

Currently, on Wednesday mornings, Isobel Skinner runs a weekly Slimming World session. However, this will be stopping at the end of December.

In addition to the large halls, the smaller rooms in the cottage are also available. These have been used for U3A meetings, and recently by our local MP, Pippa Heylings, to hold "surgeries" in the village.

Most readers will be aware that the church is used as a Polling Station for local & national elections.

Footprints Café is open on weekdays, and can provide meals, snacks and drinks to the public, whether using the church facilities or not. In fact a couple of informal groups chose to meet in the sociable café environment, rather than have a room to themselves.

Yasmin Emerson who helps with Sawston Scene would like the following noted:

Monday 23 February 2026 7.30pm at Sawston Free Church

Sawston Scene Annual Public Meeting

Got new ideas for Sawston Scene? Are there things you like or dislike? Join us for a chat over wine and nibbles, and tea and cake. Free! Contact Yasmin: diary@sawstonscene.org

Overall, the availability of the church buildings makes a very positive contribution to the local community, at many different levels.

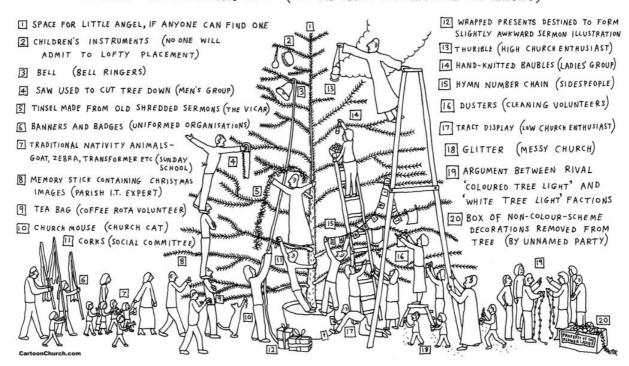
Rooms can be booked for "one-off" or regular events. A small kitchen is available for those that wish to provide their own refreshments, and Footprints café are always happy to discuss catering for small & large groups.

For any questions, or to discuss a booking, please contact Tony Winster on 07747 633737 or bookings@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk

With thanks to Tony Winster

THE PARISH CHRISTMAS TREE

THE THINGS THAT ARE HANGING ON IT (AND THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE DONE THE HANGING)



Listening to Carols With Prayers

(by Rev'd Phil Nevard)

December can be wonderfully busy—but also just... busy. Nativity plays, carol services, end-of-term everything. And sometimes the heart needs a gentler rhythm: a small place to breathe.

Here's a simple invitation for this Advent: make a little home worship space.

Nothing fancy. - A chair you like. - A candle if it's safe. - A warm drink. - An unhurried time set apart.

Put on a Christmas Carol CD (or for older people a Cassette, an L.P., a 78!) (or for younger people – stream some carols!) and between each carol, pause for a short prayer. Here are some examples – but you can pray your own prayers...

Once in Royal David's City

Prayer

God of quiet beginnings, in this season when the world feels loud and hurried, help us to notice the gentle places where love is born. In our homes, our families, our village streets—may Christ be born again in patience, kindness, and the quiet courage to care for one another. Amen.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Prayer

God who loves the overlooked places, bless all the hidden corners of our lives where hope flickers and almost goes unnoticed. As light once came to a small town on an ordinary night, let your peace rest on our village, on those who long for rest, and on all who feel the weight of these winter days. Amen.

Away in a Manger

Prayer

God who knows our vulnerability, you chose a cradle that was rough and borrowed. Hold close tonight all who feel fragile, uncertain, or alone. Rock us in your gentleness, and help us make room in our hearts and homes for the fragile ones around us too.
Amen.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Prayer

God of bigger news than we can hold, when the angels sang, the world shifted—justice stirred, peace took breath, joy found a foothold.

Let that song echo in us again: in the choices we make, in the kindness we offer, in the hope we dare to carry into the new year. Amen.

Silent Night

Prayer

Holy God,

we breathe in the stillness of this moment

and remember that peace begins in the quiet spaces within us.

Where our nerves are frayed, calm us.

Where our hearts ache, cradle us.

Where our hope feels thin, strengthen us.

Let your gentle light guide our feet into tomorrow.

Amen.

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Prayer

Welcoming God, you call us—not because we are certain, but because we are willing.
Gather us in, along with our doubts, our joys, our muddle of emotions, and let us find in your presence the courage to celebrate love made real among us.
Amen.

In the Bleak Midwinter

Prayer

God of the cold places—
in our world and in our hearts—
breathe your warmth where it is most needed.
Where resources are stretched, bring enough.
Where loneliness bites, bring companionship.
Where grief rests heavy, bring gentleness.
Teach us to offer what we have,
knowing that love, given simply, is enough.
Amen.

There's no right way to do this. Feel free to borrow a hymn book from church so that you have the words in front of you.

Just let the music soften you, and let the prayers gather your thoughts like a warm blanket.

Think of it as your own small Bethlehem: a place where God might be born again in peace, in quietness, and in the ordinary holiness of home.

December Prayers

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:5





The Giving Song (At this time of giving)

At this time of giving Gladly now we bring Gifts of goodness and mercy From a heavenly King

Earth could not contain the treasures Heaven holds for you Perfect joy and lasting pleasures Love so strong and true

Graham Kendrick cccl No 180039

May his tender love surround you At this Christmastime May you see his smiling face That in the darkness shines

But the many gifts he gives Are all poured out from one Come receive the greatest gift The gift of God's own Son

Anne Pegram

Christmas Memories

My mother always knew what presents my sister and I would like for Christmas. One year a longed for red shoulder bag appeared and I wore it all Christmas day!

We always started Christmas early as my sister Margaret's Birthday was in November so the Christmas cake plus a small sample cake for her birthday was made then.

One year my mother was unwell before Christmas but she did ice the cake with plain icing so father was left to decorate it. He had a bag of silver edible balls and threw them at the cake, the result was interesting and we thought that it was great fun.

On Christmas Day my father would take my sister and I for a long walk so as to leave the coast clear for my mother to do battle with the feast. Adventures always seemed to happen on these walks and a sweet would be handed out when we had got so far!

In the evening all of us would sing carols with mum playing on the organ, and so to bed after a happy day.

Beryl

The O Antiphons: Ancient Songs for a Modern Advent

(By Rev'd Phil Nevard)

Most of us know the Advent hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

What fewer people realise is that its verses come from a set of ancient prayers called **the O Antiphons**—short, beautiful cries of hope used in the seven days before Christmas Eve. They're old (really old—over 1,200 years), but they speak into our world with surprising freshness.

Each Antiphon starts with "O..." followed by a title for Christ drawn from the Old Testament, especially Isaiah. Together, they form a kind of Advent heartbeat: longing, waiting, yearning for light to break in.

At a time of year when life gets frantic, these prayers slow us down and remind us what Advent is actually about.

O Wisdom

Advent begins with a plea for wisdom—not the clever kind, but the gentle, steadying wisdom that shapes the world with tenderness. Wisdom is the divine presence that whispers, "Choose the path that leads to life." In a noisy December, that feels like a gift we all need.

O Lord (O Adonai)

This prayer remembers the God who appears in surprising places—burning bushes, quiet hillsides, ordinary days. Advent is a reminder that God usually arrives without fuss, in the small corners of life we easily overlook.

O Root of Jesse

A root from a stump: new life from what looks dead. Many of us know that feeling well—hoping for renewal in tired seasons. Advent whispers that fresh beginnings are possible, even when the landscape looks bare.

O Key of David

The Key of David unlocks what is closed and opens possibilities we had stopped believing in. It's a prayer for liberation, courage and hope—for anyone who feels stuck or shut out.

O Dayspring

Dayspring means "first light." Not dazzling brightness—just enough light to see the next step. Advent doesn't ask for perfect faith, only that we trust the gentle dawn when darkness begins to thin.

O King of the Nations

This is not about power but peace: Christ the cornerstone who brings people together and breaks down walls. In a divided world, this Antiphon is both challenge and comfort.

O Emmanuel

The final Antiphon brings everything home: **Emmanuel—God with us.** Advent ends not with a distant deity but with a God who shares our humanity, our messiness, our December weariness, our joy.

Why They Matter Now

These prayers don't gloss over the world's struggles. They name them plainly: darkness, longing, division, fear, hope that feels thin. They give us language for the honest kind of Advent—the one that holds both shadows and light.

And perhaps that's why they still resonate. The O Antiphons invite us to breathe, to listen, and to recognise that God is already on the way—with wisdom, with peace, with light, and with love.

If you want a simple Advent practice this year, try this:

each evening in the week before Christmas, light a candle, read one Antiphon slowly, and let its hope settle in you.

You may be surprised how these ancient words speak right into the heart of modern life.

Junior Church And Christmas Activities

Junior Church have continued to meet every Sunday morning, and we have explored themes such as Harvest and Advent this term, and learning more about the disciple Paul. The children have enjoyed doing crafts and games along those themes.

In December we will be exploring more about the nativity story and preparing for Christmas, and we look forward to the anticipation and excitment that surrounds children at this time.

December 7: usual time of 10.30am and will be lead by Julie and Matthew when we will be preparing for our nativity service and hearing the Christmas story.

Also December 7: 3.00pm Christingle and Messy Church special. Everyone welcome.

December 14: Junior Church Nativity service.

This will be in church as part of the morning's worship and, as in previous years, this will be very informal. The children hopefully will all be taking part, although sometimes on the day things change and so it's a little like a "scratch nativity" where anyone can join us and take part. Please do come and suport the children and join in if you can. Costumes and props encouraged!

December 21 will be our all age Lego Service where we follow the Christmas story in a family friendly way. There will be Christmas crafts for the children provided by the Junior Church team, and plently of Lego to play with.

December 28: No Junior Church during today's service. The leaders and helpers will be recovering!

Please do contact me for any further information.

Julie Robinson, Junior Church Co-ordinator julierob@outlook.com



Jesus The Conqueror

Jesus. That is the Name by which you conquer. Jesus.

Not as cringing suppliants but as those recognising a friend, say My Name - Jesus. "Thou shall call His Name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

And in that word "sins" read not only vice and degradation, but doubts, fears, tempers, despondencies, impatience, lack of love in big and little things. Jesus. "He shall save His people from their sins."

The very uttering of the Name lifts the soul away from petty valley irritations to mountain heights.

"He shall save His people from their sins."

Saviour and Friend, Joy-bringer and Rescuer, Leader and Guide - Jesus.

Do you need delivering from cowardice, from adverse circumstances, from poverty, from failure, from weakness?

"There is none other Name.....whereby you can be saved." — Jesus. Say it often.

Claim the Power it brings.

Merry Christmas to you all and I look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Kate Leach

The Search For Peace



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

I write this in advance of the last Sunday of the lectionary year, the Sunday of Christ the King. The gospel reading this year is Luke 23: 33-43, which includes the description of the sign over Jesus' head as he hung on the cross, 'This is the King of the Jews.' Luke tells us the soldiers laughed. And well they might. Nothing could be less like a king than Jesus. And that, presumably, is the point that St Luke wants to make. The other gospel writers make their point in different ways, but only St Luke is so completely explicit. To call Jesus a king is to use the word 'king' in a totally new way. In the way the world uses the word, Jesus is most emphatically NOT a king. The sovereignty of divine love requires a different vocabulary.

I write this just as details are beginning to emerge of the so-called peace plan for Ukraine that is being cobbled together by Russian and US agencies without any reference to Ukraine itself. Rumour has it that it proposes (i) that Ukraine surrender vast swathes of territory, (ii) Ukraine drastically reduces its armed forces and (iii) that Ukraine will never, ever, be part of NATO. Cynics are already saying that this 'peace deal' is no more than a ploy to buy time, making sure that once Russia has rebuilt its tattered army, it will be able to take the rest of Ukraine virtually unopposed, in marked contrast to its last attempt. Is that peace?

Also as I write this, I join with those who, though thankful beyond words that the genocidal slaughter in Gaza that has resulted in the deaths of 60,000 Palestinians (20,000 of them children) is now greatly diminished, are none the less deeply apprehensive about what lies ahead for the Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank. Where is peace to come from?

A major difference between Old Testament and New Testament theology is that New Testament theology suggests that God doesn't care a hoot about national boundaries. How we humans divide up our administrative domains and loyalties are not theological issues. Neither Ukraine, nor Russia, nor Israel have a divine right to exist, let alone a divine right to keep their existing borders. What matters to God, it seems to me, is that we live together in peace, harmony and mutual generosity. The measure of any peace plan generated in the spirit of Christ the 'King', it seems to me, is nothing to do with apportioning the spoils of war, and everything to do with the capacity of the proposed plan to deliver long-term peace on earth, and goodwill to (and among) all humankind.

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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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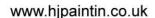
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