

Sibyls Together at Windermere Sunday 18th May 2014

1. Jenny-Anne welcomed members and introduced the meeting
2. Philippa spoke first as the committee member for membership & communications.

She began by referring to the recent **review of membership** as required by the Data Protection Act. The membership database is securely kept by Philippa. There were 140 members to begin with, and now, after the review, there are currently 55 members, some members having died, others having moved, while others are no longer interested in Sibyls. Philippa was concerned that many of those who had not renewed were among those who had joined Sibyls most recently. Please inform any Sibyls who have not refreshed their membership to do so as soon as possible.

Jenny-Anne urged that we each find one other person to join Sibyls and increase the membership.

Anthea suggested that we have an updated flyer especially for those who go to public events. Philippa reported that there was material available but that it would need refreshing.

Philippa spoke about the plans for **a new Sibyls website**, and that the work would probably be done by post-graduate students at no cost, but that security would be of the highest priority and that the students would not be handling people's personal data. The new website would include the outcomes of Chris Dowd's work, in particular the pastoral guidelines he had outlined to us yesterday.

In reply to Carol's questions, Philippa confirmed that she would be keeping the website up-to-date as communications officer.

Jan asked about web links, which will need to be developed from the Sibyls website as it currently doesn't have any.

Julia suggested that the website could include information about the geographical spread of the membership. Philippa said that this would be done but in a way that preserved people's privacy.

Anthea suggested flagging up those who would be prepared to help those who live nearby and it was agreed to explore that.

Jenny-Anne asked whether the Sibyls' listening service would continue and it was agreed that it should if sufficient people volunteered. Jane volunteered to be a listening ear. Julia suggested they should be called Sibyls' angels.

Philippa announced that the Committee is also proposing to set up **two Sibyls Facebook pages**, one for public interface and the other a closed page with aliases for members. Facebook would provide Sibyls with an additional means of communication.

The **Sibyls Yahoo group**, maintained by Jenny-Anne, will continue, especially for those who don't wish to join Facebook.

3. Tina spoke about her committee responsibility for Sibyls 'campaigning', mainly the **interface with government** (e.g. the equal marriage consultation of 2012) **and the churches**. She had done most of this through her work as a Changing Attitude, England Trustee, and at one point that organisations had had three trans Trustees, two of whom were Sibyls. Increasingly, especially in the LGBTI Anglican Coalition, Tina had worked together with Susan, though they also worked independently.

Tina was standing down after 10 years on the committee, but was still willing to do things, e.g. minutes, which she was taking today. She was also standing down as a Changing Attitude, England Trustee and Mercia had been recruited to replace her as a Trans Trustee and as one of the **Sibyls representatives on the LGBTI Anglican Coalition**, alongside Susan., Sibyls was also entitled to a third representative, and now Elaine had stood down this place was vacant.

Sibyls had made a **submission to the Church of England House of Bishops Working Party (the Pilling Group** – named after its chairman, Sir Joseph Pilling), which had emphasised the distinction between gender and sexuality but also highlighted the need of those who sought gender recognition while remaining married. This submission – like most submissions to the working party – was acknowledged but then ignored in the working party's report – '**the Pilling Report**'. The working party had decided to reach out to LGBT people who were independent of what it referred to as 'lobbying groups' such as ours, but one of the trans people who took part in those conversation found that they too had been misrepresented in the report.

The key disappointment of the Pilling Report was its decision to concentrate on the welcome to lesbian and gay people and to omit trans and bisexual people. The LGBTI Anglican Coalition has begun to address that to good effect as recent House of Bishops Statements have spoken more inclusively of LGBT people. Tina has also refreshed the Coalition's contact with Jay Hayes-Light of the **UK Intersex Association (UKIA)**, which had been trying, but without success, to begin a conversation with the Church of England House of Bishops about intersex people, and as a result, CA England and, by extension, the Coalition, now have associate membership of UKIA, which is a huge step forward.

Tina also contributed the trans specific article – another sign that our needs are not always overlooked - in the latest issue of the theological journal, **Modern Believing** which is devoted to same sex people and marriage, and drew on the work she did for a conference in Hong Kong on the legal status of transsexual and transgender people, held in September 2013.

In July she will be leading the Sibyls workshop, 'Gender, sexuality and spirituality' at the **Embodied Ministry Conference**, for theological educators, where she will also speak about

the lives of Sibyls – anonymously of course! – to inform the conference of the kind of scenarios pastors are likely to encounter in their congregations.

4. Tina reported on the **Sibyls book proposal** which has been rejected so far by three publishers – Jessica Kingsley, Equinox and, most recently, SCM Press, which had suggested two other likely publishers. There is a danger that the book's contents will become out of date but Tina and Michelle, the current editors, will continue to submit the proposal to mainstream publishers rather than pursuing private publication at this stage, and will keep the Committee updated. The proposal has also been read by publisher Val Sneddon, who was, at one time, the Sibyls Press Officer.
5. Susan confirmed Tina's point that gender has become the key issue with regard to equal marriage, adding that the focus must now be very much on loving relationships and that was central to the **research project** she has undertaken. She then summarised her three recent papers which had been pre-circulated by email and highlighted their availability via her web link.

Susan reported on the meeting between the **LGBTI Anglican Coalition** and the Archbishop of Canterbury, which took place a year ago, and how that conversation, which had begun promisingly, was suddenly shifted to the Pilling process. The Pilling Report and its management by the House of Bishops had caused immense anger. The House of Bishops had decided to take forward the Report's recommendation of **facilitated conversations**, and the planning of these now rests with Canon **David Porter**, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Officer, who is overseeing recruitment to a Resources group and a Planning group. A delegation from the Coalition met with David and at the end of June and David is due to meet with the co-Chairs of the Coalition to confirm who the Coalition's representatives will be on those groups. David is committed to an open conversation, including within the House of Bishops itself. Susan and David share a common background in relation to the peace and reconciliation process in Northern Ireland.

Julia spoke about leverage from the **College of Bishops in the Episcopal Church of Scotland** and Susan noted that we have links with the **Church of Ireland**.

6. Susan spoke to a Power Point presentation on **the future of Sibyls** based on her presentation to the Inclusive Church Partnership Day earlier this year.

Sibyls was founded as a confidential spirituality group, and the scope of its work has included meetings, outreach, support, publications, speaking engagements, workshops, lobbying, campaigning.

Social changes that have affected Sibyls members were noted, including the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and the Equality Act 2010.

The diminishing attendance at Sibyls weekends had been reversed on this weekend.

Numbers attending home groups and smaller meetings had also decreased.

There had been competition from other trans groups.

The lack of web presence, addressed already in the meeting, may well have been pivotal in the decline in response from members.

The key questions was, **'What unique contribution can, or should, Sibyls make, distinct from other LGBT organisations?'** Galatians 3:26-29 would seem to be a key text.

Many organisations today, like Sibyls, have generational concerns: **we need younger members.**

It was strongly affirmed that Sibyls is primarily a Christian spirituality group but it is, and always has been, open to those of other faiths.

The current Sibyls Committee is Jenny-Anne, Philippa, Susan, Peter, Elaine, and new volunteer Debbie, with Carol as Newsletter editor. This was seconded by Philippa and approved by all.

The Sibyls then adjourned to the Chapel for Holy Communion, led by the Revd Chris Dowd.