



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for the Transgendered
BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

36 Salmons Lane
Whyteleafe
Surrey
CR3 0AN

NEWSLETTER 39

September 2006

020 8763 0146

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Regular Meetings

London usually the second Thursday of every second month at 5.30 - Service at St Anne's, Dean Street, Soho, followed by meal at the Gourmet Pizza, Swallow Street, off Piccadilly, London. Next dates October 12th, December 14th, February 8th.

Manchester every third Saturday of the month at MCC. For details contact Jenny-Anne 01606 783035, jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk or go to www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm

Petersfield Oasis Group every four months on Friday at 12 Noon - ring Jackie 01489 878765. Next dates October 27th, February 16th.

Weekends 2007

Friday 18 to Sunday 20 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire

**Friday 14 to Sunday 16 September - Holland House, Worcestershire
2008**

Friday 16 to Sunday 18 May - Windermere

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 September - St Columba's

Other Events

Saturday 6 January 2007 - Saturday meeting at Jay's.

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for Rosie and her family, Angela Hammerton with inoperable cancer, David in ongoing illness, Michelle Le Morvan after surgery, Susie's friend Alan and his various medical problems, all those known to us who are in need, those who await a date for surgery and those whose recovery from surgery or illness has not been all that they have sought or wished for, and those with disabilities or who are in pain.

LISTENERS

People who are prepared to listen to others and are happy to be available are listed below. If you need someone to talk to, choose which one and give them a ring -

Michelle O'Brien 020 8397 2403
Jenny Bond 01623 836662
Jane Bowles 01690 760365
Michelle Le Morvan 01743 341026
Jenny-Anne Bishop 01606 783035
Carol Moore 01625 858487

The listening system works. There are a number of Sibyls who use this service. If you want someone to talk it over with, why not give it a try?

THE SOCIETY COLUMN

We are happy to announce that Frances and Richard, two long time members of Sibyls, were married in June. We are delighted by the news and wish them long life, good health and all happiness.

We are also pleased to announce that Christina and Rob were married early this month at a church in London. Our reporter at the wedding writes that the bride wore an off the shoulder slim ivory dress, very glamorous. Radiant is the word that springs to mind; she glowed with beauty. Rob looked wonderfully dignified in morning dress. They came in together with two young nephews as attendants. The service was dignified and solemn but with humour and it went very well. There was that heart stopping moment when the priest asked if there was any impediment but there were only friends present and no bigots. In fact the church was full of family, friends and colleagues, all come to rejoice. The champagne reception, held in a local restaurant, was very enjoyable. One of the Sibyls, Angela Hammerton, was an usher and Russell Reid was a guest. Again we wish Christina and Rob health, long life and all happiness.

It is a matter for rejoicing that the Gender Recognition Act has made such things possible and one can only give thanks.

A NOTE FROM ROSIE

Please accept my grateful thanks for all those who were praying for Pam and myself during her courageous battle against cancer. Thank you also for all the messages of love and support we have received both during her illness and since her death. The concern shown and prayers offered have brought much comfort both to me and to my family during this difficult time and have been truly appreciated.

Rosie Martin

YOUR NEWSLETTER

Royal Mail is now charging in proportion. Small letters are much cheaper than large letters and indeed small letters are now allowed to weigh more. If the newsletter is folded we can post it more cheaply than if it remains unfolded. Therefore the newsletter is now being sent out folded. If you really don't like this, get the butler to iron it for you.

MEMBERSHIP

Sadly a few people didn't send back their pink slips at the second time of asking. There isn't any point in saying more as they can't read it.

THE BEGGING BOWL

Again a big thank you to all those members who have responded to the rattle of the begging bowl. Your generosity is as always greatly appreciated. Sibyls is a group that is always going to run close to the bread line, and probably the healthier for it, but those donations make all the difference to our ability to continue being there. Thank you.

RUSSELL REID

Thank you to those Sibyls who wrote on behalf of Russell. There is no further news; the case is still expected to come up in October, and will probably take several weeks.

CORRESPONDENCE AND CONTACT SYSTEM

Just a little reminder. The BM Sibyls address is there to provide a box number to the general public. It means that I don't have to give out my address and people can write in the first instance to the box number. If they may cause problems, they don't know where I live. I still remember the TV who wanted me to meet him in a disabled toilet in Kensington Gardens. No way José!

However would members please not use BM Sibyls but write direct to me? British Monomarks have to stamp mail they send on, so it costs money and takes longer - much easier if you write direct.

The contact system exists. If you want to write to a Sibyl whose address you don't know, write your letter, leave the envelope blank, stamp it, and send it in another envelope to me, telling me to whom you want it to be sent. I'll put an address label on it and pop it in the pillar box. Simple.

GARDEN PARTY - SATURDAY 1 JULY

This was good. Fourteen Sibyls came and Russell Reid dropped in for the afternoon. Your editor had chosen the date long before she had thought about the World Cup and of course that was the day England played Portugal. Some determined souls sat in the lounge and watched the television, whilst the majority sat out in the garden in the comparative cool of the shade of the cherry tree. Most of the viewers gradually emerged to see what was going on but the temptation of extra time and the result drew quite a few back. This delayed the start of the communion service, taken by Suzanne, which was moving and sincere, and very much appreciated. The usual buffet supper followed which, it still being so warm, we could enjoy on the patio. It was good.

SATURDAY CHEZ JAY - 6 JANUARY 2007

There will be a Saturday gathering at Jay's house on 6 January. Like the garden party but indoors! Usual gathering about four o'clock for tea and buns, a thoughtful communion service taken by the Rev'd Martin Kelly (whom it will be a pleasure to welcome back) and then an evening of buffet, drinks and chat. For catering purposes, give me a call if you want to come. 020 8763 0146.

WEEKEND AT ST COLUMBA'S HOUSE WOKING - FRIDAY 15 TO SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

Michelle O'Brien did a wonderful job in organising a superb weekend. Colin Coward came from Changing Attitudes and spoke interestingly of the dilemmas facing the Anglican Communion of the struggle to get people to actually listen to each other. Terry and Bernard Reed of GIRES did three sessions on the Saturday speaking with total clarity on issues of transsexualism, transsexual adolescents and police issues. Excellent sessions; I overheard someone say "I knew a lot about this; now I know a great deal more." The entertainment was great fun, the food was excellent, the building

Ok (rebuilding to en suite will make a big difference) and the offices were thoughtful and informative. Bishop Alexis provided a wonderfully bouncy and uplifting communion service. A great time was had; please read Jan's account.

OASIS MEETING AT PETERSFIELD

These are excellent meetings. There is always a thoughtful and quiet communion service, an excellent lingering lunch and plenty of time to talk and to be. These are good meetings if you can get there on a Friday in the middle of the day.

We are very grateful to Jackie for arranging these and to Jenny for her generous hospitality. The cost is £10 but if you need any help with this, please talk to me. The next meeting will be held on Friday 27 October 2006, at noon. Please ring Jackie - 01489 878765 - to confirm that you are coming.

LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, peaceful and healing, followed by a good meal at The Gourmet Pizza in comfortable surroundings and a nice atmosphere. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. Few come but those that do find it worthwhile.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, 50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.30 a gathering at The Gourmet Pizza, Swallow Street (off Piccadilly and opposite St James's Church.) Next meeting - Thursday 12 October. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't. No need to book - just come.

MANCHESTER MEETINGS

Jenny-Anne and Elen organise events in the North-West. There is a regular monthly meeting, third Saturday, at the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Manchester. MCC is a friendly, welcoming, inclusive church. Jenny-Anne can be contacted on 01606-783035 or by e-mail jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk. The MCC has its own website www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm .

THE NEWSLETTER

We need articles - please write. We need interesting articles, humour, spiritual experience, ideas, controversy; something that you think would be of interest. Items can be sent by e-mail to Susie.withers@virgin.net, on CD or floppy 3½ inch disk to Jay (in Word, please) or print out in a clear typeface printed with black ink. Anything else defeats the scanner.

THE UNITED KINGDOM TRANS ALLIANCE - UKTA

We did have representation at the meeting at Cromford in Derbyshire. However the urgent need is to find a focus and agreement as to how to work together. An e-mail group has been established to toss ideas around although decisions will be made by the meetings.

I am seriously concerned as to the value of UKTA. A few weeks ago I attended a meeting at the Equal Opportunities Commission who are keen to promote the interests of transgendered people. The bill dealing with discrimination against transgendered people inter alia came up in discussion and I expressed my concern that it would perpetuate the legal right of church groups to continue to discriminate against us. Representatives of some of the major TG groups were there and none was interested in supporting me. The idea was dismissed out of hand on the grounds that the churches would get their way and it wasn't an issue worth fighting. If the attitude that the real concerns of one group can be so easily dismissed prevails in UKTA, then I have serious doubts that UKTA is deserving of support.

TALE PIECE

A gay teenager has been chosen as carnival queen by a small Somerset town. David Bridge, 15, will parade through the streets of Axbridge wearing a dress, tiara, and high heels. He auditioned in front of the mayor, who didn't have the heart to turn him down, reported The Sun. "It seemed fun and I thought I'd enjoy dressing up," said David. Just four people applied to head the parade, so mayor Barry Hamblin named two previous queens as princesses, picked a 16-year-old as queen with David as "alternative queen". Said one member of the selection committee, "It's hard enough to get people involved as it is".

Love and Prayers.

Jay Walmsley (Miss)

Susie Withers (Mrs)



John Stuart Mill:-

“The only freedom that deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to attain it. Each is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily, mental or spiritual. Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.”

GOD AND JESUS

Ruby

God made the world, for people like you and me.
Jesus died on a cross, to set us free.
The Holy Spirit came to live in our hearts.
God make everything and said it was good.
Jesus came to save the sinner, to change their soul.
God like to hear our pray, that how we get close to God.
Before, we has to kill, a lamp, to set us free.
Now we can just talk to God and hear our prayers.
Jesus was a human being, that live on earth.
He had need like you and me.
Jesus did not fall, he live near God right side in heaven.
If we are good, we will go there one day.

LIFE

Ruby

Life can be good, life is worth living,
but can be bad, do you think it worth it?
Some people look at glass, see half empty,
To other half full, what do you think?
Life is what you make it.
That what others would tell you.
Why do things go wrong? I do not know.
If everything went right, would you be happy, I ask you?
We give a hand, might be good or bad.
We try to do as much, with what we have.
That is what I think, what about you?

WALKING THE LAKE DISTRICT

Pippa Borchard

Well here I am. 1½ hours after leaving home I have parked in Newlands Valley. The weather has been poor these last two days but I've headed into the change I hope. It seemed I may be too early but during the ride from Penrith to Keswick, the lowering skies cleared and set my adrenalin free. The clouds are in two layers and touches of blue appear far to the North West. It will either clear well or settle for the worst as it did on Helvellyn two weeks ago.

8.00 a.m. and its Newlands Beck circuit - here I come. Two veteran fell runners leave the car park as I do and soon there is a large gap between us.

Derwent Water soon comes into view. The dark depths have a mirror surface with occasional patches ruffled by the breath of morning air. Curtains of cotton wool mist partially hide the cliffs above Lodore and along the fellside towards Keswick. The high hills all have a white morning veil which also trickled up the Thirlmere valley to show itself above the ridge. Pike O'Stickle in the Langdale Pikes is clear though and beckons me forward and upwards.

There are lots of sheep in the valley bottom, perhaps waiting to go to market. This morning they are making much noise saying, "good morning" and "how are you today, is it going to be fine etc". Not to be outdone the cows are all bellowing their morning thank yous for finishing milking as they leave the farmyard. A crow high on the ridge, says from his rock perch, "You make a lot of noise but you can't come up here - Caw! Caw!"

The clouds on the high hills are now very grey and thickening. Skiddaw and the Helvellyn ridge are all hidden. A mist now covers Dale Head - will I need my compass. The Pike wraps itself in a wispy mantel as I walk behind a lump of ridge and lose sight for a while. A Mountain Ash in the lee of the windy ridge is weighed down by a covering of gorgeous red berries, all waiting to provide a feast for hungry birds in winter.

A glance and then a more studied look towards the tremendous slate slabs on Hindsgarth and the hills beyond as they come into view. Black Crag - a place to linger and look back. The mist now hangs like lace over Derwent Water. Nature's beauty never fails to delight me with its infinite variety.

The veteran fell runner now passes me on his way back down the slope of Maiden Moor. I think his companion took a short cut to the lakeshore. I wonder how far he went before turning back.

A motor launch now disturbs the mirror surface of the lake. Perhaps the world is waking up on this bank holiday. Views into Newlands and beyond change but are still impressively beautiful as Eel Crag is reached. The high hills are still shrouded in cloud including Great Gable which should now be in view.

High Spy cairn is reached after 2½ hours; the time seemed much shorter as the walk is so enjoyable. I don't need a rest but feel I should. This exhilarating walk makes me forget about myself. I'm in a magical world of beauty and mystery and almost alone.

At Dale Head Tarn a harrier sits on guard and motionless, patient but not bothered by my presence. The stream sparkles and gurgles in the sunshine at the start of its journey down the valley. The peace and stillness around the tarn should last forever. The reeds stand straight in the still water and the harrier remains motionless on its rock. Up the slope of Dale Head the panorama opens up. There is less cloud and Greta Gable is clear but Scafell retains its cap of cottonwood which is lighter now.

Flat top Pavey Ark now takes precedence over the hidden Pikes and both bring back happy memories of previous scrambles. While I have a drink and a handful of dates the sun is working on the last of the lower clouds around the hills. Helvellyn's ridge is now clear but not Scafell.

An easy walk to Hindscarth provides marvellous views to the Grasmoor Fells. Purple heather contrasts with bracken green, blue sky and the meadows of Newlands - marvelous! White triangles dot Derwent Water - the tourists must have got out of bed. A long leisurely lunch beside the windbreak. No need to hide inside on such a pleasant afternoon. It's far too early to leave the fell. Lungs and legs in good order, weather excellent - Robinson here I come!

Turn west again. What a wonderful panorama - a slight wind has cleared the air and outlines are crystal clear. Murphy's Law has dictated that I only have my "Diddy" camera - I could have got some marvellous slides this day.

Great Gable and Kirkfell stand proud. They have now been redesignated "my all time favourite" mountains. I wonder why? They bring back so many happy memories. High up the slope on Robinson, Cummock Water and Lowes Water come into view. Higher still and the northern nose of the Isle of Man reveals itself behind Steeple and Haycock. Blue water in the Irish Sea and Solway Firth - even Galway looks close today. There is now an even better view of Wandope and Eel Crag in the Grasmoor Fells.

The clear air silhouettes Skiddaw and Saddleback and cloud shadows weave a magic pattern on their slopes amongst which hang gliders seem to stand almost motionless. White triangles on Derwent Water now gleam whiter than ever and scud about in the afternoon breeze. The white buildings in Keswick glisten and shimmer and the blue waters of Bassenthwaite Lake beckon you for a swim.

I've run out of ridge and sit again to admire this beautiful world before going down. An easy scramble down the last slope enjoying the peace as Newlands valley comes closer. A diversion at the rock step to find a more interesting descent is watched by another harrier, which loses interest and glides away towards a tiny reservoir in search of prey. There are two sheep dogs working to separate a stray amongst another flock which the farmer takes back to its own field.

The little church of Newlands with its vacant schoolroom is so pretty on the outside and so peaceful and serene inside. The meadows of Newlands are just as I remember them as a child, first seen when sat astride my father's strong shoulders. The sheep now graze quietly in the afternoon sun of late summer or rest in the shade, the cows too are silent. I must come back in the autumn when the colours change. This area has got to be as good as anywhere in the world on a soft October day.

And so back to the car, barely tired but with spirit satiated and at peace. I think I must be fitter now than for years, even my knees were okay on this walk. A mind at peace in God's beautiful world makes you forget physical limitations, doesn't it?

WHY (MOSTLY) I DON'T GO TO CHURCH ANY MORE

Jay

(From a Talk at the Morning Office at Windermere)

Reading the national and religious press quite interestedly over the years, I have become progressively more disgusted by the behaviour and views of church leaders. Those in my own church (Anglican) have been pretty appalling. Despite his personal beliefs, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the Jeffrey John affair, treated his friend disgracefully, and now seems intent on stifling the possibility of change within the church for the sake of unity. Unity is now Truth (or is it the other way round?), either way a pretty startling concept. The pronouncements of the more fundamentalist of the church leaders such as Archbishop Akinola are terrible. The Roman Catholics are no better. Pope John Paul II was pretty awful about anyone of whom he did not approve, including transsexuals, and has done more to set back the cause of liberalism than many a pope. And now they want



to make him a saint! The great churches are run by old men concerned with patriarchy, power and the status quo. How can one accept such men as leaders?

At a local level things aren't much better. I have found the warmth and love of congregations to be largely illusory. As long as everyone is working in the same direction and doesn't dig too deep, all feels very warm and loving. Step out of line and that warmth cools astonishingly rapidly. Having had that experience, I find congregations unreliable. The companionship lacks depth, often being ill-informed and inward looking.

My own particular church I found very frustrating. Our new priest appears more interested in getting to his breakfast, gabbling the service. There was no intellectual input and precious little enthusiasm. Invariably I left angry and frustrated. As to the content of the services! The best times were when there was no service and I could sit peacefully in a deserted church, but then they took to locking the church, and that was denied.

My experience is that institutional churches are run by old men interested in power and the fine points of legalities. Religious bodies are, and of course always have been, used for the exercise of control and power. What has any of this to do with the ideas of Jesus? His teaching has been lost. Where are the love and the life? The scribes and Pharisees are in charge; no longer is it a place for me.

By not going, the anger and frustration felt each and every Sunday have been replaced by peace. There is time to say thank you to God. There are alternatives, especially Alternatives at St James's Piccadilly, which has offered some extremely interesting talks and ideas. That's looking at faith with new eyes; that's exhilarating.

Good church I have no problem with, and one of the blessings of Sibyls is that it does offer good church. Each office and service held in, by or for Sibyls offers enthusiasm and thought, with everyone putting something, usually a great deal, into it. Far outside the control of any institutional church, such services matter, because everyone there cares deeply.

(I often suspect that we, in my own church, would be much better off if we could divorce ourselves from the Diocese of Chester and directly employ our vicar, who is an excellent preacher and lots of fun.....Susie)

FINDING MYSELF

Michelle Le Morvan

Before I can really find myself I have to find the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus) which at the Last Supper He promised to send on all his followers (John 14: 25f; 16: 5 -15). It is this Spirit who is always present within us and within the whole of creation, and it recalls to our minds the life and death of Jesus. This leads to a fundamental question, "Why did Jesus die?"

To answer this question I do not have to enter into theological explanations about salvation. I simply have to look at the Gospel story. Jesus fundamentally rejected the status quo of his day. He began by following John in proclaiming that forgiveness is a free and as plentiful as the water in the Jordan. The ritual structures and the sacrifices of the Temple and its priesthood were not necessary. His ministry was essentially "Table Fellowship" - he welcomed sinners and ate with them - with no prior demand for

“conversion” or “worthiness”. He healed freely on the Sabbath. He touched lepers and talked quite openly with women - against all social and religious convention. Finally he rejected the Temple with all its worship and rituals - in fact he rejected “the whole rotten structure”. He lived his life as a completely free person doing “what he saw His Father doing”. All that was enough to get him killed. He was a loose cannon in 1st century Judaism.

This helps us to understand Jesus just a little. He was a person who thought his own thoughts, felt his own feelings, and believed his own truth. He came to bring life not death, and He came to bring the Law to its fulfilment in the two laws of love. This surpassed the Prophets as the Prophets had surpassed Moses. What ever he taught he taught with his own authority.

My own personal experience was very different. I was brought up to believe other people’s truths, as though they came from God. I was taught to believe the Pope, the Bible, and my teachers, which was far from thinking my own thoughts, trusting my own feelings, believing my own beliefs. I was brought up, not to look to the Spirit within but to authority without, i.e. second hand religion. I was spiritually abused and my response to that abuse was a form of religious addiction. Addiction may be defined as any substance or process we use to escape from and get control over a painful reality in our lives, especially painful feelings (e.g. shame). Its purpose is to put us out of touch with ourselves.

In my case I spent 68 years seeking approval and praise from my family and friends and above all from God. This went back to childhood as the eldest in the family and it became a form of idolatry.

How did my healing come about? With the breakdown of my marriage and seeking sanctuary in a rented cottage I finally had a complete breakdown. I had to face myself without any intervening protection. I was “face to face” with me. But at the same time I was, through a friend, beginning to see the reality of Jesus and the Gospel in a deeply personal way without all the “academic baggage” that I had previously carried. It was “conversion experience”. I knew that God, the Mystery at the heart of the universe, was within me - guiding, directing and loving me, calling me to be the person I really am. At the heart of this is Self-Acceptance.

Other points follow: Christian groups, leaders and Churches can be measured by this single test: “Is any one of these a place where each person’s spiritual freedom is protected?” Then I came to understand that Christianity was not meant first of all to teach us doctrines, dogmas and creeds (all of which I now find irrelevant) but first of all it was to help us PROCESS LIFE as Jesus did.

In doing that where did it get Jesus? It brought Him to the cross. If we process our own lives, be true to our thoughts, feelings and beliefs, it will at some stage do the same for each of us. We have each received a calling - to become who we really are and to fully accept ourselves and the circumstances of our lives in the process.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jay

Several Sibyls wrote to me about my piece on the Old Testament in the last newsletter. Somewhat to my surprise, all were supportive. One expressed the view that to her the OT was “a guide to humankind’s developing understanding of the meaning of ‘God’” This I rather like, not far removed from the Archbishop of Canterbury’s view that it is the writings of men describing how they saw God had moved in their lives.

Our understanding of 'God' continues to develop (and didn't stop 2,000 years ago) and the only authority that the Old Testament has in our lives is that which we choose to give it.

POINTS TO PONDER

Some mistakes are too much fun to make only once

If you can smile when things go wrong, you have someone in mind to blame

Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened

A child has a middle name so that he or she can tell when they are really in trouble

How long a minute is depends upon which side of the bathroom door you are on

I know that God won't give me more than I can handle. I just wish he didn't trust me so much

If you can't be kind, at least be vague

Dogs have owners, cats have staff

The easiest way to find something you've lost around the house is to buy a replacement

SIBYLS WEEKEND at ST. COLUMBA'S WOKING

JAN and SUSIE

St Columba's is located on the outskirts of Woking in leafy Surrey. It is a house most appropriate to use by Sibyls as it is in transition! Like others, the house has to move with the times to meet client demand for facilities such as en-suite rooms: and so expansion and refurbishment will be carried out next year. It is, however, very comfortable and offers all the facilities needed by a group such as ours. The staff are very hospitable and the food and service were excellent.

Our thanks go to Michelle O'Brien for her hard work in organising this weekend.

We gathered together for a welcome meeting about half an hour before supper. After supper, Colin Coward described to us the origins and reasons for setting up 'Changing Attitudes' (CA). There are now 24 focus groups in the UK connecting across dioceses and parishes on LGB matters. Colin is now extending the interests of the group abroad, in particular in the USA. Colin felt that traditional Anglican tolerance was now being challenged by foreign influences within the Anglican Communion and also that Lambeth 2008 should be a new focus for the group. CA is now seriously addressing Trans matters following the involvement of a trans woman [Ed. - a Sibyl]. A lively discussion followed.

Friday's night office, conducted by Elen, was on the theme of creation and brought together both scripture and science. Elen came with a refreshingly different perspective which really made us think about the vastness of creation. We now better understand that perceived wisdom changes from generation to generation.

Saturday's morning office, from Helen and Joanna, gave a new perspective on how God comes to us through his church. Is the church the building, the hierarchy or the people? Or can it be all three?

The main speakers for the day were Terry and Bernard Reed of GIRES, a charity specialising in research and education. In the first of their sessions they outlined the biological influences on atypical gender identity development.

The second session focussed on early endocrine treatment for adolescent transsexual people and contrasted the procedures in place in the UK, The Netherlands and Boston USA. In Britain the practice is to allow full puberty to be experienced before intervention with blockers. This gives rise to a number of concerns, particularly given the great cost, anxiety and potential depression for clients endeavouring to minimise the damage caused by inappropriate pubertal development. The practice in The Netherlands and Boston is to allow the first two of the five stages of puberty to be experienced and then to prescribe blockers so as to give time for consideration before semi-reversible or irreversible treatment is given. By and large, clients in the UK appear to favour the latter treatment but the British medical profession is, so far, intransigent. It is hoped that a monitoring project be set up with the aim that concrete evidence should be able to influence future treatment.

After lunch, GIRES' third session outlined work that had been carried out with police forces, both in dealing with their own staff and with members of the public who are transgender or transsexual. Examples, together with a case history of severe harassment, provided, in great detail, clear pictures to illustrate Terry and Bernard's talk.

New members are always welcome and a year's subscription can be any amount from only £5.00. Further details of membership and GIRES' work can be obtained from their website www.gires.org.uk or by calling them on 01372-801554.

Saturday evening saw many Sibyls once again donning their finery for a superb 3 course meal followed by the, by now, traditional entertainment. From serious to comedy poetry, from song to dance and from readings to dietary and culinary advice (very 'tongue in cheek' – 'left-over wine???'). The usual high standard was maintained and we were right royally (and often hilariously) entertained for the best part of an hour and a half. Leslie was noticeably missed, being presently involved in the serious business of gallivanting around Europe having the time of her life!

Jay's night office was a welcome relief from the hectic day. The comfortable words of the Church of England compline helped to turn us back to God and to look outwards to those dear to us who were in need of prayer.

Carol then led a 'Silence Together' session.

Those of us who were so inclined then adjourned to various corners to continue conversation and consume whatever beverage took our fancy.

Sunday's morning office meditation was led by Michelle Le Morvan who continued the weekend theme of ways in which God speaks to us. If God speaks to us we must respond. We don't thank God enough. The church's 2000 years of dogma and doctrine have largely obscured the 'table' ministry of Jesus who spent a lot of time talking and teaching during meals. Much of His teaching took place in this way. It obviously upset the Pharisees but broke down barriers and so put the message of God's love over more readily.

Our Eucharist was led by Bishop Alexis of the Grace Catholic Community, a progressive, orthodox, sacramental, inclusive ministry: it was liberally sprinkled with humour and was excitingly different from anything we had previously experienced. The bishop was, at one point, asked about how inclusive was 'inclusive'. His response was, "You are baptised, you are a Christian, end of story" – refreshing, as was the whole

service. Bishop Alexis was accompanied by Mo Maria Renata of the Liverpool Grace community: Renata is well known to a number of members and, like her bishop, has a very well-developed sense of humour. Alexis pointed out that God comes to us when we least expect and also in ways that we often take for granted. We used an abbreviated form of the liturgy of St John Chrysostom, an 'old' catholic liturgy last revised in the 9th century. Further details of the Grace Catholic Community can be found on their website www.gracecatholic.net.

SIBYLS TOGETHER AT ST COLUMBA'S SEPTEMBER 2006

Jay

1. Jay thanked Michelle O'Brien for organising what had obviously been a highly successful weekend. She had worked very hard both before and throughout the weekend. She thanked Elen, Helen and Michelle Le Morvan for taking Offices, Susie for being MC, Jan aided and abetted by Susie for undertaking to be scribe, and simply everyone for being there and taking part so enjoyably.
2. Overwhelmingly those present felt that venue was a great success and would be very happy to return in the future. The only cloud on the horizon was the extension and conversion to completely en suite which might raise the prices to unacceptable levels. We have booked 12/13/14 September 2008.
3. Jay reported that the success at Windermere in May and the strong attendance this weekend meant that the weekends were very much back on course and would continue.
4. Jenny-Anne and Peter presented the results of the questionnaires. There had been about 30 replies, roughly 30% of the membership. They would prepare a report for inclusion in the newsletter but the general tone of the replies was satisfaction with what is being provided. One or two people were not happy with some aspects but generally it was "steady as she goes".
5. There was consternation when Gerry said that she felt she had been ignored at the weekend. There was a huge wave of sympathy and much concern from all who felt that she should have been better supported and that they should have noticed and done something. It highlighted that individuals could feel alone in a crowd. At future weekends there will be someone with the specific responsibility of making sure that everyone was fully included and that no-one felt left out. This is hugely important.

A SLIGHT NUDGE IN DIRECTION FOR SIBYLS

Jay

Sibyls is there to love and support each other. It's as simple as that - and as hard. One of the ways in which we seek to do this is to ensure that plenty of ideas and experiences are made available to you. Transsexual people have to and do make huge changes, and these are in spirituality as much as in anything else. One needs an idea of the

possibilities, of a “better way”, of what’s best for you. This newsletter tries hard to put ideas and inspiration before you but suffers from a lack of contributors.

At our weekends, diversity rules. Each office, each service, is an opportunity to put something forward. The takers of the offices do it in their way with their ideas. Invariably they contribute something personal. The rest of us can either contemplate something new or see something in a new way through somebody else’s eyes. Although sometimes reviled for my pains, I have encouraged a wide variety of service takers from all sorts of denominations and backgrounds. You get the experience, you can choose what suits you best. How is God speaking to you in this?

However it’s in personal development I get especially interested. Why do some transsexual people do well and prosper, why do some struggle? While working for the Beaumont Trust (which I have done since 1988) I have thought about this and tried to identify the formula for success, hopefully bottle it, and hand it out. It isn’t that simple but then it is true that in the whole of life some seem to slide effortlessly through and others struggle. Why?

What I would like to do is to organise speakers and/or workshops. These would be good quality speakers, professionals. They might not be the answer for all but they might help someone in pointing a way forward. It’s not up to me or to Sibyls to say how you should live but we can expose you to ideas and potential help.

Important areas I have identified are:-

THE FAMILY

Parents and children are the most important elements. Regarding parents, I have talked with many transsexuals over the years and in a minority, but a big minority, problems with parents, especially fathers, have cropped up. Many fathers have been abusive, sometimes sexually, more often violent, often over demanding with high expectations. It’s too late to change these experiences but it is possible to recognise them for what they are and to lay them to rest.

It is important that one’s children (if one has any) should be given as clean and as loving a start as is possible. Transsexualism muddies the waters for most families; scarcely surprising as the family is the place where gender is at its most important and a change is confusing. We need to free our children of any burden we may have placed upon them. At the extreme it’s not that rare to see examples where the transgendered person is under great stress and is transmitting that stress to the rest of the family.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Nobody is going to make your life better except yourself; no-one will make any changes but you. You have to recognise that, accept that responsibility. It’s no good expecting the Government, the Council, the Church, even the Sibyls, to do anything - they won’t. It has to be you. If you do, there are lots of people who can and will help. But if you want things to change, you have to make it happen.

Coupled with this is a saying that I have heard lately, and it goes, “In this life you get what you want.” On first hearing it, I dismissed it but it keeps cropping up and I have come round to accepting it. Of course there are situations where you don’t have much choice e.g. in the trenches in World War I, terminal illness etc, but in general the statement has much truth. You get what you want.

Perhaps it’s time to encourage people to want a bit more and to set out to get it.

CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

In some ways Christianity, as it is practised, is unhelpful. The concept of sin and guilt lies heavy and is damaging. The feelings of being a sinner and of guilt are very low in the order of individual wellbeing, especially if the one who makes you feel that way is the one in charge who can release you. Guilt has always been used to control.

My belief is in a Creator God and I suspect that he made everything, possibly to the point that everything he has made is a part of himself. To say that we are not good enough or not worthy is to deny his workmanship, which implies that either he didn't know what he was doing or screwed up. That's not my God.

Some other aspects of institutional Christianity are being nice, being good, being of service and above all self-sacrifice. These are held up to be essential Christian virtues - are they? That they are virtues I don't deny but motivation is crucial. Done as a willing gift, they are marvellous, but not as a duty. As I write I am thinking of someone who is really very nice but feels that she ought to be nice and so is nice at all times and in all circumstances coming over as false, and it's actually awful. If she just was herself rather than trying to be nice, she would be lovely.

The core of this is that it is important to develop to be a happy, contented, fulfilled human being. The gifts will then overflow. Be yourself. If you truly are you, you will do all these things, you will want to do them, willingly, with a smile. If you don't love yourself, loving your neighbour as yourself isn't giving him anything.

CONCLUSION

Where is all this leading? I want to introduce sessions where family relationships can be sorted out and where burdens of the past and those for the next generation can be lifted. Family constellation sessions are very effective and not a matter of long drawn out therapy but quick and effective. It may be possible to get experts to come to a weekend or it may be necessary to find workshops outside the weekends. However it does depend on experts, their availability and the cost.

For the other matters, responsibility and virtues, we need God-centred teachers who can put ways of thinking, ways of being, ways of doing, before you. Personally I don't believe that there is one way or one truth but that each must find their own truth and path. In no way can or should we make anyone do anything. Nevertheless we should make available opportunities, ideas, possibilities, visions.

So in the times we have available for talks I would like to take us down this direction. Not all the time, not every weekend but as part of our wide-ranging look at spirituality. It may be that we have to arrange such sessions away from weekends. It's not going to be quick or easy and it may be that we can't get the experts for a price we can afford. But it's worth a try. Myers-Briggs had a big influence, worked brilliantly. Why stop there? If you haven't got an issue, support those who have. Come and enjoy. Sibyls deserves the best we can get.