



# THE SIBYLS

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

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## **NEWSLETTER 47**

## **September 2008**

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 a meal together - October 9, December 11.

Manchester every fourth Saturday of the month at MCC. Contact Jenny-Anne 01606 783035, [jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk) or [www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm](http://www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm)

Rosie's Meeting in Dorset - every four months between 12 Noon and 4 o'clock at Rosie's house - ring Rosie 01258 830889. Next date Saturday October 11.

#### **Weekends**

**2009 Friday 15 to Sunday 17 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire**

**2009 Friday 11 to Sunday 13 September - Holland House, Worcestershire**

**2010 Friday 21 May to Sunday 23 May - Windermere**

**2010 Friday 17 September to Sunday 19 September - St Columba's, Woking**

#### **Other**

**Jay's New Year get-together Saturday 17 January 2009**

### **PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS**

Please pray for Eileina with breast cancer, David in ongoing illness, Helen for her operation, all those who cannot for whatever reason take the course of action their heart desires, and for all those known to us who are in need, 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 Le Morvan 01743 341026  
Jenny Bond 01623 836662  
Jane Bowles 01492 660147

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?

### **WEEKEND AT ST COLUMBA'S - SEPTEMBER 2008**

This was a deep and intense weekend, but happily also very enjoyable. The main feature of the weekend was the workshop on Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality organised and run by Tina Beardsley, Michelle O'Brien and Jasmine Woolley. They worked very hard and had organised and planned very thoroughly with the result that it was put over very effectively and professionally. As is inevitable in three such deep and personal topics, some areas will speak more to some than to others and there will always be different perspectives and points of view. Nevertheless there was a huge amount to get one's teeth into and lots of ideas and insights. While the workshop dominated the time, there was still time for the usual offices, well taken by thoughtful Sibyls, the splendid and uproarious entertainment and an excellent communion service thoughtfully taken by the Rev'd Steve Penrose. Despite St Columba's being a building site, we were looked after very well and the food was a delight. An excellent weekend and Elen will tell you all about it in more detail.

### **WEEKEND AT WHALEY HALL - 15-17 MAY 2009**

It is too early to book for this and indeed it is too early to even know the prices. Elen will be organising this, I have no doubt very well. Peterson Toscano will be entertaining us. As the saying goes, we have booked him at enormous expense. This will be your one opportunity to see this highly talented young man to both entertain you and give you some new perspectives on the bible. Be sure to have the date in your diary and book as soon as you can. Booking form in the next newsletter

### **ROSIE'S MEETING - NORTH DORSET - SATURDAY 11 OCTOBER**

The next meeting will be held at Rosie's house at noon on Saturday 11 October. Please give her a ring to confirm attendance (necessary for catering) and to get directions. 01258 830889. No charge, thanks Rosie, but donations to Sibyls if you wish.

### **JAY'S GARDEN PARTY - SATURDAY 5 JULY**

We were very fortunate with the weather. In the midst of a week when it rained pretty solidly and after rain in the morning, the afternoon was clear and moderately sunny. We were able to sit in the garden over tea and cake but decided that it was a shade too cold for the communion service under the cherry tree. So that was held in the dining room with the usual thoughtful service taken by the Rev'd Martin Kelly. Plenty of food (too much) and lots of

chat. The fly in the ointment was that so few came - only seven Sibyls, which is not a lot. However it meant that all could easily participate in the conversation. What was delightful was that Russell Reid dropped in for the afternoon and it was good to see him.

### **JAY'S NEW YEAR GET-TOGETHER 17 JANUARY 2009**

The usual arrangement. Gather about four o'clock for tea and buns with a communion service taken by the Rev'd Martin Kelly, followed by the hearty buffet. Time for peace and good chat. All welcome but please ring to let me know that you are coming. 020 8763 0146.

### **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 in a peaceful restaurant with a nice atmosphere. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. The new Rector at St Anne's the Rev'd David Gilmore has made us very welcome and takes the service.

We still haven't decided on a restaurant and so we will wait at the church until about 6.15 and then go to the restaurant of our choice. That creates a problem if you are late. The suggestion is that I will switch on my mobile 07719 726933 and you can ring and get directions.

Please don't ring me on my mobile at any other time because it won't do you any good. My mobile is for emergency use only and therefore it stays switched off, sometimes for months on end. Any message you leave will probably get wiped before it is heard. On the other hand messages on my home phone I will always attend to sooner or later.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, 40 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.15 a meal at a local restaurant. Next meeting - Thursday 9 October, then 11 December. 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, fourth 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](mailto:jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk). The MCC has its own website [www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm](http://www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm).

### **THE NEWSLETTER - ARTICLES**

Please - write articles for the newsletter.

Items can be sent by e-mail to [withers.susan@virgin.net](mailto:withers.susan@virgin.net) (please note change of address) on CD or floppy 3½ inch disk to Susie (in Word, please) or print out in a clear typeface printed with black ink. Anything else defeats the scanner.

A big thank you to those who do write.

## **THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE**

Tina organised our representation and she, with two other Sibyls, Stephanie and Stephen, held a workshop at Lambeth. This is the very first time that there has been a transgender event at Lambeth and I'm delighted that it was by Sibyls. Tina is to be thanked for arranging this and she has sent in a full report which is printed later in the newsletter.

## **TALE PIECE**

College girls have been ordered to stop wolf-whistling at builders. An e-mail from staff at West Kent College, Tonbridge, Kent, has warned that anybody caught sexually harassing the builders would face action. "Some female students have been making comments to, or whistling at, the builders whilst on site and as they walk around the campus," read the e-mail. "This is wholly unacceptable."

Jay Walmsley (Miss)

Susie Withers (Mrs)

## **To all our readers**

This will be the last newsletter that I shall be editing. The December issue will be produced by Susie, who is taking over. Thank you for all the help that you have given, the feedback, and especially the articles and items for publication that you have sent in. Please keep them flowing and give Susie the support which she will need in producing the newsletter, the glue which holds the Sibyls together.

With all my love and thanks. *Jay*

**LAMBETH CONFERENCE 2008**  
**SIBYLS SEMINAR: LISTENING TO TRANS PEOPLE**

Tina

Thank you for your prayers for the Lambeth Conference Fringe seminar 'Listening to Trans people'. These are some of my impressions of the event and the conference.

By lunchtime on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> July the panellists began to assemble in the Marketplace, where the Inclusive Church Network stalls were situated alongside other organisations and traders. There was Stephen, Stephanie Sheppard and myself from Sibyls; Mia Nikasimo, a young Nigerian poet based in England, and the founder of Trans Afro; and Cameron Partridge, a young American priest, representing TransEpiscopal USA. Although we had been preparing and corresponding for months some of us were meeting each other for the first time, and it felt great to be together at last.

After a quick sandwich lunch we went to set up the seminar room in Darwin College, at the University of Kent at Canterbury, where the Lambeth Conference was taking place, and then spent some time together in prayer as we waited for the bishops to arrive. Grateful that people were praying for us we needed to ground the event in prayer ourselves so that we could find the courage to 'speak the truth in love': to banish, not just the usual nervousness prior to public speaking, but the fear that we might be condemned for opening our hearts in this way.

Some of us still recall the unhappy image from the last Lambeth Conference of a bishop attempting to exorcise 'the demon of homosexuality' from Richard Kirker of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement, which fuelled our anxiety that this conference too might be unsafe for LGBT people, and especially for us, as Trans people, since our journeys are not always understood by LGB people, let alone the Church community. These apprehensions were largely unfounded, and both the seminar and the conference, during the three days that I was there, felt relatively safe, though there were, inevitably, some minor tensions.

Presumably we had been included in the Fringe programme because we represented experience that had not been heard much during the Listening Process. In retrospect it would have made more sense to include us in the main programme (which was packed) rather than the Fringe, and I made this point afterwards when I was asked for feedback.

Only five bishops attended, but this was the largest number to participate in an Inclusive Network seminar up to that point, and showed genuine commitment by the bishops concerned, as they had to absent themselves from provincial meetings to join us. One of them told me afterwards that he and his wife were both committed to the listening process, and how deeply moved he had been by what he heard. I discovered later that he was a Conservative Evangelical, exactly the kind of bishop we wanted to reach. With room to spare, we took advice from the Inclusive Church Network leaders who

were present and opened the seminar to a number of well-known journalists (though none of them wrote about it) and we were filmed by Integrity and a film crew making a programme about Bishop Gene Robinson.

Conservative blogger Hans Zeiger, who posts for David Virtue, reported the event and although most of those who commented on his post condemn us, the actual posting was mainly factual (there were a few errors – e.g. I was described as the ‘President’ of Sibyls!).

I began the seminar by introducing the panel and then spoke briefly about my own experience when I transitioned as a priest in 2001, contrasting the caution and anxiety of the bishops under whom I served with management commitment to equality and diversity in the hospitals I was working in, where transition was not such an issue and one could simply get on with one’s job.

Using slides and illustrations Stephen offered a comprehensive overview of the distinction between sex and gender, weaving in aspects of his own story, after which Stephanie gave a moving testimony as an obedient Evangelical Christian who had learned, through great personal loss and struggle, self-acceptance as a trans woman, and to receive the blessings God has attached to this.

Mia spoke next about the difficulties of growing up as a trans person in African culture, and in a family where Christian and Muslim moralism caused her to hide who she was. She is now a Buddhist. She also described the abuse and physical violence, including murder, that some trans people can experience in Africa. Cam noted that these dangers lurk in American culture too, but he also described a vibrant trans community in his part of the US (Massachusetts) and developed at length one of my opening remarks about the relation of trans to the wider debate about sexuality and gender. At the end we drew attention to the literature we had made available for participants to take away. Finally, I asked if one of the bishops would like to bless us and Cam’s bishop kindly did.



Lambeth 2008 was about conversations rather than resolutions and, despite the fact that three moratoria remained on the table as the Conference ended, my own encounters with conservative bishops, whom I met around the campus, and the representatives of conservative organisations I spoke to in the Marketplace, left me feeling hopeful that the faith which unites us is so much bigger and stronger than the issues that currently divide us.

Further reports on Lambeth and the Trans Seminar, by Cameron, Mia and me, can be found on the TransEpiscopal blog at [www.transepiscopal.blogspot.com/](http://www.transepiscopal.blogspot.com/) [this site is often updated so click ‘older posts’ at the end of the home page if the Lambeth posts have been moved].

Colin Coward, Director of Changing Attitude, England, reported on our seminar at <http://www.changingattitude.org.uk/news/newsitem.asp?ID=376> and Hans Zeiger's report for the ultra conservatives (be warned about the comments that follow it) is at <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=8711>

## **WONDERFULLY MADE**

By Mercia MacMahon

A Transgendered Reading of Ps. 139 (NRSV)

1: O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

*God, I don't like all this talk about searching and knowing, there are parts of my brain so private that even my wife doesn't know about them.*

2: You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

*God, sitting and rising, who cares, but stay out of my thoughts; I can't bear the thought that anyone else knows what goes on inside my head.*

3: You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

*When I lie down that time of peace is when I most get to plan what life would be like if I had been born a girl. Be acquainted with most of my ways, God, but leave me with the privacy of my most secret thoughts.*

4: Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

*I am to be left with no private space at all.*

5: You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

*God, I want to be free to be the person I feel myself to be, I have spent my life being hemmed in by society, God keep your hands to yourself!*

6: Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

*Wait God, don't go away. If you hem me in you are protecting me; you are valuing me. No-one knows about me, so no-one is able to value me. Please God, be in my thoughts so that there is someone to love me as the whole me.*

7-10: Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

*Oh God, can you really value me as a trans person? Will you really hold my hand?*

11-12: If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me become night, "even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

*So often I have used the darkness to hide my secret deeds, help me God to find light in my life of fearful secrecy.*

13: For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

*Does that apply to me as well, I always thought that I was a freak because I was neither male nor female; but you created humans as male and female, so that means that I get to sum up your human creation, not just one half or the other.*

14: I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

*I have always felt fearful, but never wonderful, O Lord; help me to accept his new truth. I believe, help my unbelief.*

15: My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

*I have always hated my frame, especially after the changes to that frame in my teenage years. You are asking me to love myself, but I need your help to do so.*

16: Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

*Lord God before I was born you knew what I would become, but still you loved me, I think I am going to cry.*

17-18: How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them - they are more than the sand. I come to the end - I am still with you.

*God, your thoughts are precious to me because now I know that my most cherished thoughts are precious to you. Now I am crying.*

19-22: Oh that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me - those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil. Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.

*God, it was going so well: so much of my fear is because I am hated; don't ask me to hate anyone; I need to be loved and I need to love.*

23-24: Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

*There is nothing that is wicked about being me. Help me, God, to follow you as the whole person that I now feel myself to be.*



## **LGBT Panel Discussion at Greenbelt 22nd August 2008**   **Report from Elaine Sommers**

This is a personal reflection, as it was a totally new venture for me and I was way out of my comfort zone!

I arrived at the massive Greenbelt site on Cheltenham Racecourse and wondered what I had let myself in for. 14,000 happy campers milling around the site where OuterSpace had organised their discussion event on 'Coming out in the Church'. Would anyone attend? Would there be disruptions from opposing factions? Would I go blank when asked questions? Help!

Not to worry, Alex Huzzey from Changing Attitude was on hand to reassure me, and after some coffee we made our way to the venue which was [a] difficult to find and [b] had been changed at the last minute. So anyone who managed to find the session was going to deserve a medal for persistence. I met the other panellists - two gay, two lesbian and two transgender, of which I was one. The other was Rev Sarah Jones, who is a vicar in Ross-on-Wye. She is a wonderful communicator, and even if I had said nothing, she would have made up for me. It was good that Sarah could represent transitioned trans women and I could speak on behalf of what I call 'part-timers', those who spend only some of their time as women. David Warren was to chair the proceedings, and after he had briefed us we took our places on the platform and waited for people to arrive.

They started coming in ones and twos, and slowly the room filled. By the start of the meeting the room was at its capacity of 230, and there were many more standing outside the doors, straining to hear. I really should have been nervous, but strangely I wasn't, and instead I had a sense of peace and confidence, which I can only attribute to God's presence and help.

David asked each of us to introduce ourselves, and then enquired about what it was like to come out to our churches, what things were difficult about it, and where we able to find help. This inevitably revealed some of the journeys people had been through and it was moving to hear of the traumas, struggles, but also the blessings that had been experienced. It was striking to hear that all six panellists were now members of mainstream churches and had been accepted by them. Sadly there were also stories of rejection by churches before people had discovered these fellowships that had welcomed them.

The overall impression of the session was, I believe, very positive. The audience was attentive and responsive, and the short time for questions at the end reflected how interested people had been in hearing these very personal stories. I felt that a real service had been done in furthering understanding of the LGBT Community and that the time had been very valuable.

After the meeting we retreated to the Bar for some liquid refreshment and a chance to get to know each other. One of the gay guys said he had never met a transgender person before and that he had really learned a lot from the experience. All too soon I had to make my way back and find my car (no

mean feat in the dark amongst thousands of others). As I drove back home to Bristol I reflected on the evening and felt it had been a watershed for me. It had been my first experience of publicly sharing about my gender in relation to faith. I do hope and pray that it won't be the last.

*(If you would like a copy of my booklet 'Faith, Gender and Me' please contact me at elainesommers007@yahoo.co.uk)*

## **SIBYLS TOGETHER AT ST COLUMBA'S SEPTEMBER 2008**

Jay

1. Jay opened the meeting by saying that this was the last time she would start by saying that Sibyls was a tyranny. It was now moving smoothly towards being an oligarchy.
2. Jay thanked Tina, Michele O'Brien and Jasmine for organising a very successful and enjoyable weekend and for all their hard work in running a detailed and intensive workshop. She thanked Elen and Jenny-Anne, Phillippa and Louise, Michelle Le Morvan, and Susie for taking Offices, Susie for being MC, and Elen for undertaking to be scribe, and simply everyone for being there and taking part so enjoyably. There was discussion about returning to St Columba's. As Sibyls Together was being held on a Saturday it was hard to judge the weekend as a whole. The general impression was that despite half the house being a building site, we had been looked after very well and we would like to return. The only reservation was a concern that the prices post extension might be simply too much.
3. We have booked Peterson Toscana to be with us at Whaley Hall. He is an American entertainer and a gay activist, lately a transgender activist. He will be running a workshop on the Saturday morning and his show about transgender characters in the Bible will replace the usual Saturday evening's entertainment. This should be both highly entertaining and offering a new perspective on matters biblical. Jay had been worried about the cost as we have paid a half share of his air fare from the States and will have to pay for him at Whaley Hall plus the expense of getting him to Derbyshire. However we have had some highly unusual and unexpected donations which have gone a long way towards the cost and for which we can be very grateful.
4. Tina reported briefly on Lambeth and said that she had prepared a strategy paper for the committee as she considered that we should be represented on the various Christian bodies seeking for full inclusion for LGBT people. We would need people who were keen to be our representatives. She also showed copies of her book on Pastoral Guidelines recently published by the Gender Trust.
5. Jenny-Anne mentioned that a Transgender Christian conference is being held in Birmingham in November and she would be happy to supply details to anyone who is interested.

6. Elen is organising a weekend in North Wales to which Sibyls would be welcome.

## **THE WINDERMERE WEEKEND MAY 2008**

Jay

I travelled on the Thursday which was cold, wet and horrible. Euston Station was in turmoil, with hordes of people milling around with no trains, the consequence of a massive signal failure at Bletchley. Luckily the trains were restored and off we went, albeit crowded and late. The little train to Windermere had been kept waiting at Oxenholme. At Kendal it filled with schoolchildren. Most of the girls, aged about 11/12, were wearing eye make-up, so I talked with one asking if it was allowed at school. She said it was. It wasn't like that when I was at school.

It was good to be back in Windermere where the sun was shining, and the Centre is always welcoming. This year I thought it was looking exceptionally spruce. Rosie and Cerys also had come early and we enjoyed a convivial meal in the local Indian restaurant.

On Friday having slept soundly, I was woken by an insistent wood pigeon. A church was in residence for the week and Rosie and I joined them for breakfast. Talking to one couple, they told us that their daughter is a Buddhist nun. Whilst pleased that she was happy, they were concerned for her long-term future. Her mother confided that what really upset her was that when she took her vows, she was given a new name. After all the trouble that her mother had taken in choosing her name, she was deeply upset that it could so easily be changed. That struck home to both Rosie and I - a valuable insight.

Cerys set to work on her Office for the evening, Rosie departed with her bus pass to go to Keswick which she wanted to see, and I made a bee line for Rayna's dress shop which is a joy.

In the afternoon people started to arrive and it was good to meet and greet, settle people in, talk and catch up with each other. At supper Lawrence, the Director, made us welcome. He is keen that the URC should be actively encouraged to embrace diversity. After supper I thought it right to outline my views on the leadership issues and Plan B. This gave those assembled an opportunity to think over the weekend. Elen then read a paper "Has the trans community a future?" She was worried that genetic engineering might factor us out. Personally I got a lot out of being transgendered but recognise that it brings problems for others. It gave people a chance to air their views. For her Office, Cerys took four readings with a commentary which was good OK. Wine and chat followed with everyone off to bed before midnight.

On Saturday we enjoyed the usual hearty breakfast. Michelle gave an excellent meditation on Peace. Thoughtful and biblical, it came very much back to the point of finding the peace within, without which you aren't going to

create much peace. There was plenty of time for discussion and it was very good, with some were very vociferous. One could see clearly those who were at peace, those who were near, and those who were miles away.

After coffee, five set out with Pippa on her guided walk. She does it professionally in the Lake District and I learned later that they all thoroughly enjoyed their time out on the hills. Lesley cadged a lift from Greg to Bowness to ride the lake steamers. Off went the rest of us in the mini bus in Greg's capable hands. He's fun, very thoughtful and looks after us splendidly.

He took us up past Thirlmere to Keswick, sorry Rosie, and then through Borrowdale, over Honister to Buttermere, where we stopped to eat packed lunches. These we had to eat in the mini bus as it was raining. Our return to Keswick was via Newlands, and then Greg drove out east to Penrith and back along the length of Ullswater. It was a superb outing which covered more than a few miles, and I enjoyed it, although perhaps a shade long. Greg did us proud, looked after us well and provided an interesting commentary.

During dinner Pamela Richmond arrived and caused chaos. Having moved her stuff into her room, she managed to lock the door from the outside rendering it unopenable. Lawrence had to be called from home and finally had to get a ladder up to the window and break in to his own Centre.

The entertainment was hilarious. Lesley has become the permanent MC and runs things in inimitable style. Will we ever see the video? The turns were excellent but sadly memory fails me for the detail. Susie was hilarious - *The Ballad of the One Legged Horse* brings one to tears. Elaine played delightfully on the guitar, Mercia read a moving poem, I have memories of Cerys concentrating, but everyone played their part and a good time was had by all.

Lesley took the Night Office with music and then a very straightforward and brief Compline, which was just right for the time of night. We followed this with Silence Together, which this time I'm pleased to say was honoured, and for which quite a few stayed. Silence Together has been a time when things have happened and deserves to be honoured. Afterwards most gathered in the lounge to wind down with a glass or two of wine. After a hectic day, most were not over late to bed.

On Sunday I woke feeling good. Silence Together left a huge sense of wellbeing. A good walk in the sunshine for a paper and then quiet time in the chapel only improved matters. After breakfast, Susie took the Morning Office with her usual thought and attention. This was followed by Sibyls Together, which led to a committee meeting after lunch, was highly productive but was reported in the last newsletter.

The Rev'd John Foulds, whom Elen had brought to Whaley Hall, again took the communion service. He takes a thoughtful service which was appreciated and enjoyed by all. This was followed by the group photograph, which was a chaos of people dashing out to take photographs and then dash back into the

ranks. I wonder if one was taken that had all of us in it. A splendid three course Sunday lunch; Windermere do us proud for food - and everything else.

Loads of farewells, everyone had enjoyed themselves. We held the committee meeting, the first ever. At about 3.30 it was all over.

Our thanks are due to Elen Heart and Jenny-Anne who organised and ran the weekend. It was an excellent time, hugely enjoyed and we are grateful for all their hard work and efforts to ensure that it was a success.

Six of us stayed on and we had a gentle afternoon and then went for a Chinese meal in Windermere followed by a general collapse and chat back in the centre. It was a lovely time together.

Rosie and I stayed the extra day and overnight Monday. Rosie enjoyed her expedition and I wandered around locally, both of us getting good value from our bus passes. When a weekend is being held in such a beautiful part of the world, it seems a shame not to make it into a small holiday. That idea is thoroughly recommended.

## **A REQUEST - PASSED ON BY ROSIE**

Hello there,

I am currently researching a new series for BBC 3. The series consists of six, one hour films, each divided into two half hour stories on a similar theme. The overarching theme for the entire series is bravery. We are aiming for these stories to be warm, moving and inspirational.

One of the areas that I am very interested in is gender reassignment surgery as this is perhaps one of the bravest decisions that somebody can make. I was wondering if you might be able to pass this email along to the members of your group in the hope that somebody might be interested in getting in contact with me and sharing their story. Obviously, simply getting in contact does not commit them to taking part in any way and all calls will be treated as confidential.

To give you a little more information about the show: we are filming the series over the next 2 months and it is due to air weekly on BBC 3 at 8pm, early in the new year. The stories would be first person, narrative, observational documentaries. This means that they would be told from the point of view of the person being filmed and we would simply follow their journey. We would want to film them for about a month in total.

Many thanks,  
Jessica  
020 8008 2904

Sandra Moore's thoughts on why homosexuality is such a problem to the Abrahamic religions were interesting and they set me wondering how we reached the point that the Christian view of sex is that it is only permitted in marriage.

Sandra's idea about why homosexuality causes such convulsions is as follows, and I quote:-

"One finds the answer in the Jewish roots of all these religions. It is a specifically Jewish idea that "men are men and women are women" and that the process of reproduction taking place between them is holy and subject to God. One will not by and large find anything similar within other religious traditions which survive only in remnants. But one can examine Celtic religion, Indian, Chinese, etc and discover nothing like the emphasis on differences between men and women, and far more emphasis on what is common between genders. In those cultures, of which the Greek is the main example, one reads e.g. Plato's Symposium, in which men discuss love and beauty in terms of their boy paramours or young "Apollos". But we have to be clear that in the spiritual climate of Athens, sex with one's wife was considered an unimportant affair, whereas in Israel and religions derived from its religion, it was considered a duty, holy and necessary, commanded by God in all but very exceptional circumstances. On the other hand, homosexuality, which in Athens was normal, was in Judea a frightful sin which deprived one of being human at all."

This seems a very fair answer.

Biblically sex and marriage had a pretty rough ride. The happy Victorian concept of a devoted husband with a loving wife at home with children was a very new concept. Abraham himself was quite prepared to lie with a maidservant to achieve an heir; David in his lust murdered a friend to obtain his wife etc. Marriage wasn't a bed of roses and sex was pretty much what the man desired. How did we get to sex is only OK within marriage?

It's very understandable that men did not want their women to stray. Whatever love there was or was not within the marriage, the man wanted to be sure that the children he was raising were his, and that his son and heir truly was his son and heir. Marriage until very recent times was much more a question of property, policy and treaties, at more levels of society than just the uppermost, than an affair of romantic ardour. Inheritance had to be along the true family line. This also suited women as they wished their children to be reared in security and to inherit in due course.

But these are all good economic and social reasons for marriage and for fidelity within it. Whence cometh the theological imperative that no other sex is permitted? Could it be, heaven forbid, that Christianity took notice of Society's rules?

There is the Old Testament idea that the seed shall not be spilled, i.e. male masturbation is out. This of course comes from the ignorance that only the male produces seed, that it was "planted" in a woman who was either fertile or barren, and inside her grew the seed. Hence the seed was precious. However the writers were ignorant of the woman's egg and the necessity of that in producing a baby, which incidentally demolishes most biblical accounts of the Virgin birth.

Of course sex only within marriage is an extremely simple rule and therefore one can see its attractions to religious leaders, who, as with most leaders, like to ensure that their ideas are imposed on everyone else. But how did it reach such heights?

It is of course the easy stick with which to beat gays and lesbians. They can't get married and therefore they aren't allowed to have sex. End of story. That they can have civil partnerships now is something that many Christians refuse to recognise and in any case it is not marriage. So they can't - and mustn't.

My personal view on this, and I have tried to read about it and come to some conclusion, is that any couple who are deeply committed to one another are going to express that in a sexual relationship. If there is not that deep commitment and the sex is casual, it doesn't seem to me to be fulfilling or wise, but who am I to condemn it? If the relationship is deep and committed, then it is natural and it really doesn't seem to me to be the end of the world if it is within or without marriage, between male and female, or between a same sex couple.

But then thankfully it is of no consequence to anyone else what I think. But I still don't understand exactly how we got to the point that Christian sex is only within marriage between a man and a woman.

