



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Transgendered People

BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

www.sibyls.co.uk E-mail: info@sibyls.co.uk

Newsletter No. 53 – Spring 2010

Those acts which offend God may not outrage us, yet those things which offend us may not outrage God. Remembering that God loves us unconditionally, let us hold in God's presence those who are, or who feel that they are, outcasts from society because it doesn't approve of their actions or their being.

~ O ~

Thank you to all who are prepared to receive their Newsletter by e-mail. Please let both Rosie and me know (rosie@sibyls.co.uk and Susie@crewesue.com) if you can help in this way, and don't already do so. Don't worry; we're happy to send your newsletter on paper if you don't have the necessary electronics.

Thank you very much to Jay, Helen Mather, Rosie Martin, Elen Heart, Stephanie Sheppard and Elaine Sommers for the items this time. To Elaine, I send my heartfelt apologies; having gone to the trouble of saving and crediting her contribution, I then omitted it from NL52. Duh!

Please send me articles and other contributions; please also let me have up-to-date information about events.

Very many thanks to those who do write or send me items for publication. If you can send e-mail, MS Word (I can now even cope with docx files produced by MS Word 2007), most other word processors or even just typed (with a decent ribbon!), it is very much appreciated. News cuttings can often give a different slant on things and can usually be scanned.

Please don't worry if you have no technology; I can copy-type if necessary. **BUT... please bear in mind that I am Severely Visually Impaired so, if you must send me hand-written contributions, please make sure that I will be able to read them! If you have something handwritten and it runs to several pages, please think about (a) having a friend type it for you, or (b) telephoning me, and I will audio-type it straight into the newsletter.**

A few lines or enough to fill a few pages, I shall be grateful for anything you send.

Please send items to:
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Crewe
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Tel: 01270-250207

E-mail: susie@crewesue.com

Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or Sibyls in general.

OUR MISSION

The Sibyls is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, and their supporters, offering companionship along the journey, and information/advocacy to churches. Sibyls pray, eat, and talk together, and seek to fulfil Christ's command to love one another.

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for David in ongoing illness, Ruby in hospital, all who are contemplating or recovering from surgery, 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 prepared to listen to others are worth their weight in gold. We are happy to listen to you, and if you can catch me at home, you are welcome to call. If you would like to join the list, please let me know. Do remember that we are not trained to give advice – but a problem shared in confidence often seems less of a burden. If you need someone to talk to, choose one and give them a ring: -

Jenny Bond 01623-836662

Jane Bowles 01492-660147

Carol Moore 01625-858487

Jenny-Anne Bishop 01745-337144

Helen Mather 0115-922-6450

Jay Walmsley 020-8763-0146

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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 - June 10 and August 12.

MANCHESTER; Jenny-Anne and Elen organise events in the North-West and North Wales. There is a regular monthly meeting of TransForum (Manchester Trans Discussion & Support group), 3:30 pm Fourth Saturday, at the Metropolitan Community Church in Manchester (MCCM) – **please see below.**

MCC is a friendly, welcoming, inclusive church. JennyAnne can be contacted on 01745-337144, mobile 07500-741955 or e-mail jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk

The TransForum group web page is www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm , there are also directions to the group venue on this website.

You are also most welcome to attend our Sunday communion service at 4:00 pm every Sunday at Metropolitan Community Church , Manchester(MCCM). see www.mccmanchester.co.UK

NOTE: Please do check the website, or with Jenny-Anne, as arrangements for MCC and the TransForum may change in the near future.

JAY'S GARDEN PARTY - SATURDAY JULY 3

Firstly my apologies for the cancellation of the January get together. All the arrangements were in hand but the weather defeated us. My little lane was well and truly iced up and was extremely dangerous, indeed I couldn't get my car out for six days. It would have been highly dangerous to hold the party and whilst I apologise to all who were looking forward to it, it was the right decision.

Come to the garden party in July, Saturday the 3rd. Usual mixture, gather about 3.30 for tea and buns and chat, the communion service late in the afternoon, and the buffet, wine and chat into the evening. Martin Kelly will take our communion service and I look forward to

seeing as many of you as possible. Please phone me, 020 8763 0146, so that I can try to get the catering in line.

ROSIE'S MEETING - DORSET

Every four months between 12 Noon and 4 o'clock at Rosie's house. The next meeting is due to be held at noon on Saturday 12th June 2010. Please ring to confirm these dates and also to let her know that you plan to attend (necessary for catering). Please also ring for directions. **01425-270540**. No charge, thank you Rosie, but donations to Sibyls (if you wish) would be greatly appreciated.

WEEKENDS

2010 Friday 21 to Sunday 23 May – Windermere

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

2011 Friday 15 to Sunday 17 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire

In view of the cost of the Woking weekend, Rosie has included an item in this newsletter regarding the future of weekends.

Help can sometimes be made available if you would like to go to a weekend but have financial constraints; please talk to Jay in confidence (0208-763-0146).

OTHER INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

City United Reform Church, Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 2BZ, 029 2022 5190. You'll find its website at www.cityurc.org.uk. Revd. Monica Mills has written to tell us that this church welcomes all to their Sunday service at 1030am.

Dorset Gardens Methodist Church, Dorset Gardens, BRIGHTON BN2 1RL 01273-605502 (www.dgmc.org.uk) . All are welcomed regardless of age, gender, race or sexual orientation. Raymus Bowerbank has written enclosing a programme of events.

There are a number of other churches who welcome trans-people. The Metropolitan Community Church embraces diversity. I've been to East London, Manchester and Bournemouth and was welcomed like the prodigal. If you have access to the Internet, a church's mission statement should give you a clue. You could try calling the pastor to ask about their attitude. Let me know of others and I'll include details in the Newsletter.

LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

These are always good evenings to which all Sibyls are welcome with no need to book. These are gentle lovely meetings 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 Rector at St Anne's, the Rev'd David Gilmore, makes us very welcome and takes the service. December was a record with an astonishing nine people attending; we haven't managed more than six before!

We have decided to choose the restaurant when we meet 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. I will switch on my mobile 07719 726933 and you can ring and get directions. Don't ring at any other time on that number, I have just found messages going back to 2007!

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 says so and it is), and from

about 6.15 a meal at a local restaurant. Next meetings - Thursday April 8, June 10 and August 12. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't. No need to book - just come.

~ O ~

THE ROAD TO ACCEPTANCE

Elaine Sommers

It has taken me most of my life to come to terms with being transgendered. At long last I have been able to fully accept myself and understand who I really am. I do not have all the answers, but at least I am content and at peace.

With that in mind, it would be unrealistic of me to expect those I know to accept my transgender side without any difficulty. In fact, I know that I cannot and should not expect or demand anything from them to that end. However, I do want to encourage my friends and family to consider these things further and travel along what I have called the Road to Acceptance.

I have heard a wide variety of opinions on transgender. I've listened to these viewpoints, as well as reading comments in books, magazines and newspapers. As a result I have identified four levels of transgender acceptance, though they are really part of a continuum. The purpose of defining different steps is simply to highlight the process a person might go through on their road to acceptance.

Level One: Intolerance

At this level transgender people may be regarded as sick, warped or perverted, and are looked on with a high degree of suspicion. They are best avoided and may be considered a risk to children. The Media can be intolerant too, sometimes 'outing' people in a negative light, with ridicule and misrepresentation. I speak with experience, having been the target of this sort of exposure (in The Sun no less) and it was a distressing and traumatic time for me and my family. Fortunately, over this period we had wonderful support from friends, work colleagues and people we hardly knew, so we were able to weather the storm.

In some Christian circles any expression of gender variance is seen as sinful and in need of repentance, healing or both. Church leaders may ban a TG person from all forms of leadership and ministry, and even exclude them from church membership. I have met several people who have been turned out of their congregations; it is a dreadful experience to have to go through. Some have never got over it and remain bitter and alienated from the Church and sometimes from God too. This is a situation of great sadness.

In my own situation I was banned from any form of ministry, which made me feel excluded by the fellowship. Who would want to stay in a fellowship where they are seen as 'living in sin'?

Level Two: Tolerance

The common response of many British people on considering transgender (or any person who is different from the norm) is a kind of uncomfortable acknowledgement of that difference. Whilst they have a gut feeling that it 'isn't normal', they are not going to make a big deal about it. It's not talked about any more than necessary, and then only in hushed tones or in a rather embarrassed way, often mingled with some joking. Think how many pub jokes or remarks in sitcoms refer to men in bras, stockings etc?

In my own experience, this tolerant approach, whilst not completely antagonistic, usually avoids facing the main issues involved. Life goes on much as before and friendships seem to be unaffected by the knowledge that I am TG. I am reluctant to raise the subject for fear of upsetting them or causing embarrassment. My gender identity issue is seen as my private business and something they do not wish to see or discuss further. Many churchgoers adopt this type of approach to TGs in their fellowship. They haven't really thought the subject through, but are prepared to tolerate it, as long as that's as far as it goes.

Level Three: Acceptance

The next level is a person who has accepted the fact that someone is TG, but goes further by exploring the subject more. This may involve reading, talking with TGs and asking them questions with an open mind. It takes time to work through deep-seated negative feelings that society, family and church may have instilled into them. The friend now becomes more concerned for the well-being of the individual than before and will go to some length to support him or her in any difficulties and stresses they are going through. The initial embarrassment has now gone and they are comfortable to discuss the subject with their TG friend.

Many of my friends are in this position and they are a great support and help to me. I am still reluctant to raise the subject with them, in case they think my TG side is becoming too important for my own good. This can then lead to some awkwardness - and transgender once again becomes a taboo topic, never to be mentioned.

Level Four: Inclusion

There is I believe a level beyond Acceptance where the TG side of a person is seen as something to be embraced and even appreciated by those around him or her. This is a fuller kind of acceptance, which I call Inclusion. The TG person is valued and welcomed, irrespective of whether they present in their adopted role or birth gender. Any confusion that this causes for the friend or family member is something that they are prepared to work through themselves, even if it requires some effort and heart-searching. Transgender is no longer seen as an enemy, or something that needs to be discouraged (like trying to persuade a smoker to cut down or give up their habit).

I have friends who fit this description, and I am very grateful for their support. I can talk freely with them about my female side at any time, without feelings of judgment or disapproval. I know that they are happy to be with me in either presentation and some say they actually prefer my Elaine side!

Questions

How can someone move along the road to acceptance?

People who have never considered TG before may, when presented with the subject, get on the road at varying start points, not always at the beginning. It will depend on their background and upbringing and the way they view the world in general. For some the gender issue will be no big deal, whilst for others it will be more difficult. The starting place will make a huge difference as to how their journey progresses and where they get to. Some people may not move at all and it is hard to know how to help them. The hardest thing for TGs to take is that people don't approve of them. It is sad to think that our trans side is so unacceptable, but it is not for us to try to force a change of view.

Can the TG do anything to help a person along the road?

For those who *are* prepared to explore the issues and challenge their initial reactions, I would firstly encourage reading around the subject (and that means wider than sensationalist articles in the gutter press). It would also be helpful to chat with anyone with specialist knowledge on the subject. Beyond that there is much to be gained by talking with transgendered people themselves, as this will bring a more personal perspective to what is often seen as 'a problem area'. Transgender *is* about people and the sooner we can look at it this way the better.

If possible it is good to meet the TG in his or her transgender mode. This can help to diffuse any misconceptions the person may have about what it is to be transgender and is reaffirming for the TG to see that their friend is prepared to make that effort.

I have friends who have taken time to do some or all of these things and it has usually helped them to become more understanding and accepting. Sadly, very few of my former church

friends were prepared to talk with me and ask questions, let alone meet me dressed. There was little I could do about that other than accept that they are entitled to their views.

Can someone go backwards on the Road?

Some people I know have been initially reassuring when they learned about my transgender side. They may have understood my dressing as a weekend pastime that wouldn't impinge on life in general, or that it was something I would eventually give up. When they realised that it was much more deep-seated than that, they started to back off, wishing it would all go away. Their discomfort increased as mine decreased. They feared that I was going on the road to full-time transition and were unsure whether they could ever cope with that. Their level of acceptance seemed to recede, something I found difficult to cope with.

So, yes, it does happen, but I'm not sure I can do anything about it.

What is your hope for the future?

My hope and prayer is that more transgender people will dare to stand up and be counted and that this will encourage those around them to explore the whole subject and consider how they can to be more accepting of transgendered people.

Surely this is going to take a very long time?

It probably is, but for me tomorrow wouldn't be too soon. I want to do my bit right now. I have seen too many transgender friends living secret lives in misery and loneliness. They deserve better. How can I put it off any longer? Writing this booklet is but one step towards that end.

~ O ~

I shared a cruise liner cabin with Elaine last May for 10 nights. Where that girl gets her energy from I've no idea; she made me feel old. I didn't see much of her; if she wasn't taking dancing lessons during the day, she was tripping the light fantastic (Okay, it was dark) all evening. Sheesh! And you should have seen the number of evening dresses she brought with her....(Ed)

~ O ~

TOWARDS WHOLENESS

Stephanie Sheppard

I was fascinated to read Sandra Moore's piece in the last newsletter about the hidden self in most people, of the female in men and the male in women, also of Susie's piece on the feminine aspects of God. This is frightening stuff to many people and certainly to people who are intent on looking at God as either wholly masculine or feminine and therefore judge others by that blueprint.

The bible uses both masculine and feminine words for God but talks of a whole God not a God split by worries between his/her sexuality but a God at peace with himself, at home with both aspects of himself, what a difference between God and his people, so afraid of their other part they deride people who have the courage to challenge these fears and stereotypes (transgendered people). Yet the fact remains in the Christian faith that God is a God who judges by the heart which of course raises the question does God see the physical me or the me I am in my heart? For me I came to the conclusion that as the bible states that God sees into my heart and judges me on my heart then God sees the true female me and that gave me the push to change away from repression to acceptance. However I believe the truth Sandra was making was that we are complex people of many parts both female and masculine and that only by accepting every part of ourselves will we attain wholeness. In transition it can be easy to submerge any male side to ourselves just as before transition it was the way to submerge any female side to ourselves. To be truly whole we must accept each part of us as special, each part of us as God given. The question then is not what am I, but much more in what role gives me the greatest chance of peace. For me I decided that I had the greatest chance of peace as a female and despite a challenging transition have remained true to that choice. One of the wonderful things I've found in transition is that God

has been true to me in so many ways as I've followed my decision to be true to God and not the church's teaching. So many people fear that by disobeying the church's teaching on transgender they are disobeying God. Each person must make their own choice but for me it became a choice between obeying a God who saw my heart, and a church who saw my physical me. I'm glad to say that my obedience to God is more important than the church's teachings with obvious results but one blessing of the desire to obey God is I'm now the worship leader of the main Methodist church in Huddersfield as well as being a lay minister in charge of LGBT matters. You see obeying God does bring results and integrity is stronger than fear.

Much is said by transgendered folk to justify ourselves against the accepted truth as given by the churches and being on the defensive whereas the whole thrust of scripture talks of a whole God and coming to Him as we are. The question shouldn't be is the church right or wrong but what is God's will for my life? In answering that question honestly we will find that instead of being a persecuted minority we have a prophetic role in the church challenging people to come to God as themselves and not as society wants them to be.

For me that desire to obey God has changed my life, has given rise to the LGBT ministry in the Methodist church and for me has given me a chance of peace in my life that wasn't there before. I have found that each part of me is special, each part of me is God given and the desire to be like God has given me the courage to change.

What a wonderful God we serve; a whole God, a God who sees into our hearts and loves us. As Jesus said whoever desires to worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.

For me I don't know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future. I walk towards it in confidence with a whole, living God walking with me.

~O~

THE FUTURE OF SIBYLS WEEKENDS

Rosie Martin

Booking forms for the two weekends planned for this year at Windermere in May and St Columba's in September are included at the end of this Newsletter and I hope that you will be able to come to at least one weekend.

As you will see, the cost of the September weekend at St Columba's is more than 10% above that of Windermere and, in fact, the true cost is significantly higher. The main reason for this, apart from generally increased running costs, is that many Retreat Houses now need to look to the more lucrative corporate market for weekday bookings in order to just remain open and, as a result, accommodation is often being upgraded to meet the expectations of that market. The knock-on effect for groups such as Sibyls is that we gain from the much-improved facilities such as en-suite bathrooms but lose through significantly increased charges.

St Columba's normally charge groups such as Sibyls 15% below the commercial rate but I have managed to negotiate a further reduction of 10%. However, even with a 25% discount, the true cost per person is almost £160 for full-board accommodation from Friday evening to Sunday lunchtime. This includes the full and exclusive use of a suitable meeting room and the chapel but does exclude wine, which has historically been included in the price.

Your committee had a long discussion about the weekend at St Columba's and agreed to seek input from the e-group members as a guide to whether we should go ahead or cancel. The response from that survey was split exactly 50-50 so, as organiser of the weekend and with the agreement of Jay as Treasurer, I have taken the decision to go ahead and The Sibyls will subsidise the weekend from funds. We will be using a significant amount of Sibyls funds as a subsidy and therefore hope that many will want to come and that some may even be able to make a donation towards the true cost.

The cost of this weekend both to those attending and to Sibyls funds gives rise to the question of how to proceed with future weekends. A second question on the e-group survey asked whether we should only have one weekend each year, and I am pleased to say that the response was unanimously in favour of keeping two.

However, this has implications for future planning as I believe that St Columba's have priced themselves out of our budget as did St Katherine's some years ago. Quite simply, if we wish to stay in what is effectively 3-star accommodation, we are going to have to pay much more than we have done in the past.

Your committee would therefore welcome your input to the following questions:

1. What is the maximum you would be prepared to pay for a weekend?
2. Should we maintain the aim of one weekend in the north and one in the south?
3. Can you recommend a retreat house that would suit our purpose?

We have given consideration to the possibility of meeting in a hotel and using a local Church for our Sunday Eucharist. Although we would benefit from reduced costs, we would also lose the ability for our morning and evening offices to be held in a place of worship and, perhaps more importantly, lose that place for individual times of quiet reflection before God. I firmly believe that we need to retain our identity of being first and foremost a Christian Spirituality group, and I fear that we would be in danger of losing the very thing that sets Sibyls apart from any other transgender group, if we were to move away from using retreat houses for our weekends.

There are several criteria that I believe are important to take into account when responding to the above questions:

1. We need to cater for about 24 people.
2. Exclusive use is preferred but not essential.
3. At least one suitably sized meeting room is essential as is a chapel.
4. Retreat houses are booked very early so we need to be thinking about 2012 now!

I hope that you will take this opportunity to help us plan our future weekends even if you think that you will not be coming along.

Please write or email me at: 1 Woodruff Close, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4UN or rosie@sibyls.co.uk.

There will also be an opportunity to air your views on this at Sibyls Together at Windermere in May.

~ O ~

Jay has sent this item from the Sunday Times of 13th February 2010. The Windermere Centre, where we will have our spring get-together, is on Crescent Road.

AA or the FBI?

Send for Agents Mulder and Scully: dark forces are at work in the Lake District, where motorists are being mysteriously locked out of their cars. They can lock their vehicles with remote control keys, but can't then unlock them. The phenomenon affects cars in Crescent Road, Windermere, where one resident, Judith Ainsworth, said: "I tried to lock my Renault Megane the other day, and all four windows came down instead."

Local drivers blame a new set of traffic lights, although experts say this is unlikely. Anthony Dean, who works nearby, said: "I've tried to help scores of motorists. One day while I was struggling with a woman's key fob, the lights changed colour and her car doors sprung open as if a ghost had unlocked them."

~ O ~

The Sibyls at St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden
November 13-15th 2009
Images of God



St Deiniol's was a new venue for the Sibyls. Yes, we had discussed it as possible on several occasions, but it took a crisis to make it a reality. Our planned weekend at Holland House had been double-booked, and it had seemed that the weekend at Whaley Hall would be the only one in 2009. But at the last minute, we had a second weekend.

Because of the late booking, it was in mid-November, rather than September. There were fewer of us: fifteen in all, most in shared rooms. Our programme, too, was rather lower-key than usual. Still, it was a weekend, and an adventure...

I'd a travelling companion for this weekend. Amy, whom I'd introduced to Sibyls on a brief visit to the Whaley Hall weekend, wanted to go for the whole weekend.

She arrived at 1550: time to park, transfer her luggage and get a coffee. Essential!

We left at 1610. Just over 100 miles: two-and-a half hours; there in time for dinner.

Our journey was straightforward for rush-hour, and we made good time, but the weather got wetter and wilder as we went on. Within ten miles or so of our destination we were stopped in a queue on the A55. Amy rang Susie: we'll be half-an-hour late.

But at last we reached Hawarden: now where's the Library?

"turn left here"

"no, the sign says straight on..."

"we're in Broughton; we've gone too far..."

We found it the second time, tucked well away: much more compact than I'd imagined.

So, park the car; get a few bits out; and get out of the rain. Ouch! Puddle. The car park was full of puddles, and there was a three-inch deep lake at the entrance! Oh well, shoes off and paddle...

Shelter at last. But the door's locked and nobody answers. I hope they don't mind the wet footprints; at least we're out of the rain! One of our houseparty eventually opened the door for us after some ten minutes (*"don't open to strangers"* Oh well, thank you!)

Now: find Susie; find food!

We eventually found the girl on reception: eat first; check in later, she advised.

This time there was plenty to eat, even at three-quarters of an hour late: St Deiniol's has a good kitchen. Hotpot and a baked custard for afters: that'll do nicely! And coffee...

Now to check in; *"too many 'H's' in that name..."* At last!

Another couple of paddles and the luggage is in. Now where's our room?

It's a big double room at the end of the top corridor. This looks good.

All the bags in: sort them out later; there's just time to change before the meeting.

We found the others in the conference room: ours exclusively for the weekend.

Susie had just started her introduction and welcome. This is a smaller gathering than usual; even so, there were a few new faces.

Susie started with music: a selection called *"Aspects of music"*. She'd chosen six pieces illustrating images of God from musicians as varied as Handel and Oscar Peterson.

But the low-tech CD player won't play Susie's disc (it doesn't like computer-written discs, it seems; blame modern technology). It'll have to be the DVD player in the corner. That's not easy for Susie to see: *"can anyone work this?"* she pleaded.

Now that is one splendid AV setup: six-foot screen, integral projector, multimedia box. Ah, a DVD player. And this works. Music at last! It looks like I've got the job...

She invited us to listen and reflect, with just a few words on her own thoughts.

After a five-minute tidy-up break, we had a short and straightforward little service of Night Prayer led by Christine Jenkins, just right for the first night, including Psalm 139:

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me..."

a psalm special to Sibyls, and a reading from 1 Corinthians 13:

"Love is patient; love is kind..."

We decided we'd spend some time exploring the house; making up for time lost earlier.

Next door to the small meeting room is a big lounge: plenty of space; books to read; **and** a bit of a fire in the grate. Amy took time persuading it to give some warmth.

Janet, in typical rainbow mode, lay stretched out with a book, but no-one else had stayed for long. We left Janet with her book sometime around midnight while we explored a bit further afield. It was nearly one o'clock when we did get to bed.

But I wasn't quite tired enough for sleep, so it was headphones on; radio on; light off. Goodnight. Good listening...



Mr Gladstone's garden – early Saturday morning

... I was awakened by Amy, who put the light on at 0645 – but then that's late for me!

When we opened the curtains, the sun was lighting up the trees outside. There was blue in the sky and a rainbow!

Sharing a room might have proved difficult, but in the event there was plenty of room.

We soon dressed and tidied up. Now for breakfast!

There's a choice for breakfast: porridge, or a full cooked breakfast at an extra cost.

The cooked breakfast looks tempting, but we're getting a lunch. Save my money...

The porridge is filling enough though, and there's plenty of bread.

I thought Holland House's toaster was a marvel: this is well hi-tech. Feed the bread in – it goes under the element on a conveyor and drops down underneath where you can't reach it – that's what the tongs are for... Conveyor? Cremated bread? Only if you put it back for a second go; but that makes for great toast!

After breakfast we moved into our own little room.

Mercia MacMahon led a discussion she'd called *God and Gender in Worship*.

She first gave us a brief overview, then opened with a very short, though complete, act of worship, using exclusive feminine imagery (we've no men with us on this weekend!)

Mercia invited our reactions to, and comments on this "experience".

"...fantastic: much better than any we use at the moment..."

This certainly proved a thought-provoking way of starting, and initiated a lively discussion on the femininity of Jesus, and the "beyondness", yet total inclusiveness of the Person we usually call "Father".

Mercia then brought us back to the use of gender-specific language in worship, and the implications of using specific gender images. She'd provided a handout containing a number of quotations; many, but not exclusively, from feminist Christian authors; exploring feminine and masculine images of God.

A very interesting and illuminating hour, which could have gone on for much longer...

Angela, a new member: *"a friend of Rachel Ridley; I don't think Rosie's even got her on her list yet..."*, remarked Susie, had bravely offered to lead the next session, after the coffee-break.

She'd brought a large number of paintings: *"paintings that I've done over the last year or so; I call them my 'narrative dream, daydream or diary paintings.'"*

She handed them round - there were enough for at least two for each person - and asked us to describe our impressions...

... which were very varied; some highly imaginative, maybe reflecting our own individual backgrounds. Angela added very few comments, but let us have our say.

Now, the next item could well have been described as an advertisement!

Tina Beardsley introduced her book *Unutterable Love*: an exploration of the life and theology of F.W. Robertson, especially in his treatment of gender in the Scriptures; written, put aside, and returned to later, as her doctoral dissertation.

She explained her own involvement with the author, and her first experience of St Deiniol's, as a study centre; then gave a summary of the book, taking in many images of masculinity and femininity on the way (so referring back to Mercia's earlier session).

Orders being taken now: there are just three copies available at a discount price today...

Tina invited comments, and so followed yet another lively discussion!

But now for lunch. If it's as good as last night's dinner, that'll suit me! Looks good.

I chose tarragon chicken: it's every bit as good as it looks. And for afters, a diet-busting chocolate and orange sponge pudding. Too many calories...

I had planned to travel back to Nottingham for a not-to-be-missed choral concert, stay overnight, and return for breakfast on Sunday. But I was tired after the long journey last night, and the weather was still changeable. I thought I'd wait and see...

By half past one I had to decide. Angela was considering a ride out to Chester: she's never been before. I have, and know Chester well, so I offered to show her around.

That's **my** afternoon decided.



Christmas shopping!

I'd just to make a trip to my car for some strong, waterproof shoes then we were ready.

There's a bus stop nearby. Can I use my pass? No, this is Wales; it's a foreign country!

During the 20 minute journey we had a chance to find out more about each other (we knew already that we have a mutual friend in the Sibyls).

Once I'd worked out where the bus had left us in Chester, we headed for the city centre.

But it's Angela's afternoon; make suggestions and let her browse...

First stop, shops, then on to the walls: a must-see; where we met a man who could talk for England. Angela reckoned I'd met my match! So did I! But we didn't go far: there was a cold wind blowing and the walls are far too exposed.

Having located the bus station, and confirmed our return bus, we headed for shelter.

Starbucks! Half an hour's warmth and coffee!

But when we returned at five o'clock, I realised what I'd done: the weather had held settled, at least here, and now it was far too late to go home for my concert.

Wrong, wrong decision: big disappointment; tears.

Thanks, folks, for putting up with my moods: hormones, who'd have 'em?

Saturday evening was low-key: instead of the usual in-house entertainments, we had a film. That big screen will come into its own now. I'd already got the job of working the player anyway (Susie had not-so-secretly wanted me to stay this evening...)

Well, this may not be in-your-face oratorio, but it's still biblical. And I didn't get away from patriarchs and prophets either: not Elijah, but Noah. We watched *Evan Almighty*, a very funny take on the Flood story: very American, and so still quite reverent. I didn't know God (Morgan Freeman) was black with a white beard: a real good-looking guy!

After a short break (for reorientation?) we'd Night Office, held tonight in the Chapel.

Although it's right next door to our meeting room, I'd not yet seen it. The Chapel at St Deiniol's is a long, low room with a ceiling "like an upturned boat", light and airy.



Amy had been asked to lead tonight. We must push our newcomers in at the deep end! If so, I seem to have been overlooked; or got away lightly: it depends how you see it...

Amy modestly remarked: *"for a Baptist, this will be a baptism of fire!"*

(She's well prepared really: I've been teaching her "Anglican" for a year or so now!)

Tonight's Night Office was in a style similar to last night's, but fuller and rather longer.

The psalm was no.134:

"Bless the Lord, all who serve in God's house...

Lift up your hands in the holy place and bless the Lord..."

and the reading, 2 Corinthians 4:6-10:

"...it is the God who said 'let light shine out of darkness' who has shone in our hearts..."

Well led, Amy!

The handful of us who weren't ready for bed yet went back to our little room afterwards for wine and a natter. I spent some time talking with Tina, but by 2330 there were just two of us left: Susie and myself. It certainly isn't like my earlier days, when we stayed up until well after midnight talking...

Oh help! Amy went long ago: she's no night owl.

But it didn't matter – she was still up and about. Ah well, another late night...

...Sunday morning; and it's a fine day today. We were up at the same time as yesterday, so it was almost a normal Sunday for me. But Amy was dressed in her ordinary clothes, and so was everyone else. Oops! I felt so overdressed in my best *Monsoon* dress (though I **have** worn this one to church.) I chose porridge again for breakfast: very filling. And there was The Toaster as well, with plenty of bread; and as much coffee as I could drink.

After breakfast, we had the group photograph. There **has** to be a group photo! Traditionally, we usually do this just before lunch, but it's always been rushed, so it's more relaxed taking it now. (It was: very demure compared with the usual free-for-all!)

The sun's out on the front of the house now: just right...

Sibyls Together (our policy and planning meeting) is traditionally held on the Sunday morning. This weekend was more relaxed than previously, so this time it was more a discussion forum than a business session; nevertheless, we covered a variety of topics.

We started with thanks to everyone involved in making this last-minute weekend work. All agreed that, given the circumstances, the weekend had been an unqualified success.

The discussion was interrupted by the arrival of Sister Renate (The Revd Sister Maria Renate, of the Bethlehem Community, Liverpool), who would later lead our Communion service.

Welcomes over, we resumed a discussion of the merits of open *versus* closed venues.

We do need some new venues: ideas, please; could members do some reconnaissance work? And how did we feel about the new-style, low-key weekend? Should we have a full programme, or should we have small workshops like we had this time? And what about outings: minibus or try-it-and-see? And the Entertainments?

Elen advertised some other, non-Sibyls weekends, and reminded us that she and Jenny-Anne were able to offer a welcome to Sibyls members at their home, either as a "safe house" or just for a break.

Tina gave us an update on the Gender and Spirituality workshop (very much a Sibyls workshop), and reported on the progress of the Sibyls book. This is now in process of editing, but further contributions could still be accepted. We also need a publisher.

She also explained her work on engaging with LGBT Christian groups. The meeting agreed that Sibyls should be associated with the new LGBT Anglican Coalition, a group specifically targeting one church which is experiencing difficulties. The general opinion though, was that the *trans* community was a poor relation within the LGBT movement: we have our own specific issues, and need to be seen as a separate group in our dialogue with the churches.

Almost at the end, a paper was handed round with the invitation:

"The Eucharist this morning is a Baptismal affirmation as well:

"If you would like a baptism certificate in your chosen name put your name on the list."

That somehow sounded right to me; I put my name down.

Now **this** dress is just right for a baptism!

After a coffee-and-reorientation break we moved into the Chapel for Communion.

This is the last time we meet together, and has been the high point of many weekends.

Today's Eucharist followed an Ecumenical liturgy with strong Celtic links, which made an interesting change from the Anglican *Common Worship* that we often use.

We had a good piano and a pianist this weekend too, so we could sing out for once.

Good! There are some good singers among us, given the opportunity...

After opening with the song *Be Still, for the Presence of the Lord*, the service started with the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows. There were six candidates, as well as Sister Renate (who admitted that she felt privileged to renew her own vows among us).

This part concluded with the Lord's Prayer; everybody holding hands.

The Communion service proper started with a Creed specially written for this weekend and inspired by its theme *Images of God*; our Communion hymn was the well-known *Lord Jesus Christ (Living Lord)*. I love the way we share the Bread and Wine hand-to-hand; and I was intrigued to see that the bread we used was in the form of individual tiny loaves: an interesting change.

There were the usual Sibyls traditions: individual prayers with candles, and the Peace where everybody gets to hug everybody else. But there was one tradition missing: the service finished with a quietly confident song: *Do not be afraid*; rather than our usual *Guide me O Thou Great Jehovah*.

It was an appropriate end to a gentle but very intense service. It had been very special; certainly one of the most moving of all the Sibyls Communion services I've been to.

Maybe St Katharine's in 2002 just wins, but that was altogether different...

I stayed behind in the Chapel for a little time talking; I didn't want to rush away yet.

I'd still to change into my travelling clothes; by the time I got back everyone had found places and was eating. There was no hotpot left, so it was chicken again; but it's good...

As usual, people drifted away soon after lunch. I'd been sitting at a side table, so I missed one or two, but managed to catch others. You win some, you lose some...

I'd to break off to make sure I saw them, so there wasn't much dessert left either!

Amy was patient: there's no rush, she said; and the fruit salad's good. It was.

Sister Renate hadn't gone early though, and I was able to thank her...

But I'd saved the glory of St Deiniol's till last: I hadn't had time to see the library yet.

Amy had: she'd had a chance to explore yesterday afternoon, and showed me round.

It's a hidden gem: behind an unassuming door, there's a veritable cathedral of a library.

It's beautifully built: huge, books on two levels; all dark wood, but well-lit and spacious.

(No photographs please, but there are pictures in the brochure and on the website.)

And there's a large archive section: a researcher's paradise; with an online catalogue too.

Amy had already slipped out; she's ready to leave. I closed the door quietly behind me.

Just keys to hand in, handbags to pick up, and close the big front door one last time...

Now, Mum lives only 30 miles away. There's time for a quick visit; introduce a friend...

tailpiece...

The move to St Deiniol's was a necessary one, if we were to have a second weekend this year, but the change in style, a departure from usual, was more experimental.

Most of the houseparty were Sibyls veterans, and could easily cope with the various changes, including the open venue (and so earlier misgivings were proved wrong).

I liked the laid-back, more open atmosphere of the weekend, and I **loved** St Deiniol's. I'd certainly come back again.

Well done Susie. It paid off!

The Communion service Creed:

We believe in God, the Father of all peoples; the Creator of the heavens and the earth, of the rivers and seas that cover the earth, of the sun and the moon, and the heavenly bodies that fill the universe; the Author of the lofty mountains, and lowly valleys; the One who is above the heavens, and beneath the skies. His image and likeness is imprinted upon the earth and sea, and everything that is in them: such He has as His abode.

He inspires all things, gives life to all things, stands above all things, within all things, and beneath all things. He enlightens the light of the sun, He strengthens the light of the night and the stars, He makes wells in the arid land and dry islands of the sea, and He places the stars in the service of the greater lights.

He has a Son who is co-eternal with Himself, and similar in all respects to Himself; and neither is the Son younger than the Father, nor is the Father older than the Son; and the Holy Spirit breathes in them.

And the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable.

Amen

Some useful links

St Deiniol's Library

<http://www.st-deiniols.com>

Unutterable Love

<http://www.lutterworth.com/lp/titles/unutter.htm>

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=86183>

the Bethlehem Community

<http://www.bethlehem-community.vndv.com>

<http://www.holyceremonies.com/bethlehem.aspx>

THE ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

We have ended the year with an astonishingly large surplus, which gives strength for the future. Much of this surplus is due to Tina Beardsley's donation of £760 from the estate of the late Angela Hammerton. Their generosity is much appreciated.

While it cost the group to have Peterson Toscana entertain and teach us at Whaley Hall, I think that all who were there would feel that it was money well spent. It is important that Sibyls provides opportunities for members to see other points of view and help them to develop both as individuals and in their faith. It was also encouraging that we were able to spend some money on enabling people who otherwise could not afford it to come to meetings.

My congratulations to the committee on a successful year. However I am sure that they would wish donations to keep coming in as there is always a need, especially with all the work that is going on to ensure a trans representation on every relevant committee.

THE SIBYLS RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

	2009 £	2008 £
RECEIPTS		
From members in respect of meetings	3,854.00	4,564.50
Use of group funds	153.50	-
Meeting receipts	4,007.50	4,564.50
Deposit Paid in previous year	-	100.00
Donations	1,710.32	1,120.90
Advance bookings	-	-6.00
Bank interest (net)	0.03	1.29
	<u>5,717.85</u>	<u>5,780.69</u>
PAYMENTS		
Cost of Meetings:-		
Paid to House	4,066.00	4,440.50
Other expenses	49.50	100.00
Coach trip	-	216.00
Meetings Costs	4,115.50	4,756.50
Use of group funds for members to attend meetings	153.50	-
Deposit paid to St Columba's	-	100.00
Newsletter duplication and envelopes	232.55	276.58
Newsletter postage	118.05	135.27
Rainbow Alliance expenses	80.00	-
Donation to Catholic Bible Society in memory of Michelle Le Morvan	30.00	-
Inclusive Church advert	-	100.00
Lambeth Seminar Expenses	-	63.14
Peterson Toscana's air fare	-	237.50
British Monomarks box number	65.80	65.80
	<u>4,795.40</u>	<u>5,734.79</u>
CASH SURPLUS	922.45	45.90
Opening balance at HSBC Bank	372.90	327.00
Closing balance at HSBC Bank	<u>1,295.35</u>	<u>372.90</u>
Made up of:-		
MEMBERS' FUNDS	1,395.35	472.90
Deposit Paid to St Columba's	-100.00	-100.00
	<u>1,295.35</u>	<u>372.90</u>

These accounts are prepared on the receipts and payments basis, consistent with previous years.

THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for the Transgendered



12 Ffordd Las
Rhyl
Denbighshire
LL18 2DY

☎ 01745 337144

WEEKEND AT THE WINDERMERE CENTRE

21-23 MAY 2010

Name

Required - Single/twin room (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant in room

Willing to share with

Address

.....

.....

Phone No.

Email address

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Full weekend (Friday night to Sunday lunch) £125.00

Other (please specify):

*If you are not coming for the full weekend please telephone Elen
on the number above and you will be quoted a price.*

Cheque payable to “Miss J Walmsley – The Sibyls” enclosed ?

Any special dietary requirements?

Any other special needs?

Do you need help with transport to The Windermere Centre?

Can you offer a lift to someone?


Please send this form with your cheque to Elen Heart, address above

THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for the Transgendered



1 Woodruff Close
Christchurch
Dorset
BH23 4UN

 01425 270 540
email rosie@sibyls.co.uk

WEEKEND AT ST COLUMBA'S, WOKING

Friday 17th – Sunday 19th September 2010

Name

Required - Single/twin room (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant in room

Willing to share with

Address

.....

.....

Phone No.

Email address

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Full weekend (Friday night to Sunday lunch) £140.00
(please note: this does not include wine which may be purchased separately)

*If you are not coming for the full weekend please telephone or email Rosie
on the number above to discuss your requirements.*

PLEASE NOTE THIS WEEKEND IS BEING SUBSIDISED FROM SIBYLS FUNDS SO ANY
DONATION TOWARDS THE TRUE COST WOULD BE APPRECIATED.

Cheque payable to “Miss J Walmsley – The Sibyls” enclosed ?

Any special dietary requirements?

Any other special needs?

Do you need help with transport to St Columba's?

Can you offer a lift to someone?

Please send this form with your cheque to Mrs Rosie Martin at the above address