



# SIBYLS NEWS



**THE SIBYLS**  
**Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People**  
BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX  
[www.sibyls.co.uk](http://www.sibyls.co.uk) E-mail: [info@sibyls.co.uk](mailto:info@sibyls.co.uk)

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

*Hebrews 1:1-2*

From the squalor of a borrowed stable,  
By the Spirit and a virgin's faith;  
To the anguish and the shame of scandal  
Came the Saviour of the human race.  
But the skies were filled with the praise of heaven,  
Shepherds listen as the angels tell  
Of the Gift of God come down to man  
At the dawning of Immanuel.

*Immanuel, Stuart Townend, 1999 (©Thankyou Music)*

## **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.

## **OUR RULE**

Members must respect the security of each and every other member, and must never jeopardise that security.

## **PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS**

All who are contemplating or recovering from surgery, and those struggling with transition.

All those who cannot for whatever reason take the course of action their heart desires.

All those known to us who are in any kind of need,  
and those with disabilities or who are suffering from physical or emotional pain.

Rosie tells me that some Newsletters, both posted and emailed, have been undeliverable. I realise that the Newsletter may well be a lifeline for some people, but to avoid waste,

**Please do keep me informed of changes of contact details.**

You can contact me at: [hjmather.24@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hjmather.24@tiscali.co.uk) or on 0115 9226450

Thank you to all who help to keep cost down by receiving the Newsletter by email.  
Please let me know if you would like to receive your copy by email.

We will still send a paper version if you prefer.

Please note that views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or of Sibyls in general.

~~~oOo~~~

## HELEN'S THOUGHTS



*Where did this summer's Newsletters disappear to?* I hear you say. It's partly my fault, as I've had a busy summer, but partly because there was nothing to write. I'm sorry to those who rely on the Newsletter as a point of contact and source of information.

I've enough articles for a decent-looking Newsletter this time: thank you, Jay and Raymus for your contributions.

I've included my own belated report of the spring weekend at Whaley Hall. This was a touch-and-go affair up to the last few days, with people finding they were unable to go. In the event, it went ahead with four members. It was a small meeting, but enjoyable nevertheless.

In anticipation of a better response, I've attached the booking form for the Windermere weekend next May.

I wonder why there seems to have been so little interest in the Newsletter recently: I do hope it's not my influence! Seriously, it may just be that we're having a slack period, or it may represent a real change in the Sibyls dynamic, as trans people are becoming a normal part of a more accepting society. But I don't think Sibyls is dead yet!

A Happy and blessed Christmas to you all...

~~~oOo~~~

## DOCUMENT DESTRUCTION

Jay

When I stood down from running Sibyls, I said that I would destroy the correspondence from Sibyls that I held. Like many things in life it was put off. However the roof on my house needed replacing and the builder asked me to clear the loft in preparation. Thus necessity propelled me to do that which should have been done a while ago.

I have been through all the files; all letters more than two years old have been shredded. Retained were a copy of the newsletters, the accounts and expenses, and one or two relevant documents. All the rest has gone.

A social historian would regret the loss of so much material. However there was much of a very personal nature which I am quite sure the writers would not wish to be read by anyone else. The only way to ensure that it could never be read was its destruction and that has been done.

~~~oOo~~~

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014

The Windermere Centre, Windermere, Cumbria

*Autumn 2014*

*St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Flintshire*

~~~oOo~~~

## REGULAR MEETINGS

**LONDON** a few members gather on the second Thursday of every second month at 5.30 for a Service at St Anne's, Dean Street, Soho, followed by a meal together.

The last meeting in 2012 is 13<sup>th</sup> December, and dates for 2013 are 14<sup>th</sup> February, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 13<sup>th</sup> June, 8<sup>th</sup> August, 10<sup>th</sup> October and 12<sup>th</sup> December.

**MANCHESTER** events in the North-West and North Wales are organised by Jenny-Anne [jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk) and Elen [elen.heart@btinternet.com](mailto:elen.heart@btinternet.com).

## OTHER INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

Metropolitan Community Churches throughout the world embrace diversity.

In the UK there are churches in North London, South London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Dorchester, Torbay, Bath and Newcastle. See [ufmcc.com/](http://ufmcc.com/) for details.

**CARDIFF** City United Reformed Church ([www.cityurc.org.uk](http://www.cityurc.org.uk)), Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 2BZ, 029 2022 5190, *Sunday service at 10.30am.*

**BRIGHTON** Dorset Gardens Methodist Church ([www.dgmc.org.uk](http://www.dgmc.org.uk)), Dorset Gardens, Brighton, BN2 1RL, 01273 605 502.

**OXFORD** St Columba's United Reformed Church ([www.saintcolumbas.org/](http://www.saintcolumbas.org/)), Alfred Street, Oxford, OX1 4EH, *Sunday service at 10.45.*

**EXETER** Southernhay United Reformed Church ([www.southernhaychurch.org/](http://www.southernhaychurch.org/)), Dix's Field, Exeter, EX1 1QA, *Sunday service at 10.30am.*

**LONDON** St Luke's Parish Church ([www.chelseaparish.org/](http://www.chelseaparish.org/)), Sydney Street, London, SW3 6NH, 020 7351 7365.  
St James, Piccadilly ([www.st-james-piccadilly.org/](http://www.st-james-piccadilly.org/)),  
St James's Church 197 Piccadilly London W1J 9LL / 020 7734 4511

Soho Masses ([www.sohomasses.com/](http://www.sohomasses.com/)),  
Church of the Assumption & St Gregory, Warwick Street, London, W1B 5NB

Many other inclusive churches may be found by going to the Inclusive Church website ([www.inclusivechurch2.net/](http://www.inclusivechurch2.net/)) and clicking on Churches.

Please do let me know of any other inclusive or welcoming Churches and I will do my best to include details in future Newsletters.

~~~oOo~~~

## SIBYLS LISTENING SERVICE

People prepared to listen to others are one of God's greatest gifts to us. We are fortunate in having some members who are happy to listen to you and chat with you. Please remember that we are not trained to give advice – but a problem shared in confidence often seems less of a burden. The listening service really does work so if you want someone with whom to talk with, why not call one of the following volunteers?

|              |               |                   |               |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Jenny Bond   | 01623 836 662 | Jenny-Anne Bishop | 01745 337 144 |
| Helen Mather | 0115 922 6450 | Carol Moore       | 01625 858 487 |
|              | Jay Walmsley  | 020 8763 0146     |               |

~~~oOo~~~

## JAY'S GARDEN PARTY – SATURDAY 6 JULY AT WHYTELEAFE

The annual event, the garden party, was held on 6th July and went very well. We were blessed with a wonderful hot sunny day.

The garden party followed the usual pattern in that we assembled from about four o'clock and could sit outside. Indeed so sunny was it that we elected for the shade of the cherry tree for tea and cakes. Penny again kindly brought her home baked lemon drizzle cake which one can only describe as superb. It was peaceful in the garden and we didn't have to stir until the communion service, taken as usual by our good friend, the Rev'd Martin Kelly. Martin always puts a lot of thought and prayer into our services, and it was excellent. Afterwards the usual large buffet and a pleasant evening until folks had to go home. With travelling and advancing years the evening did not finish late.

Again the numbers were slightly down. There were only eight of us but that was enough for good company and an enjoyable time.

~~~oOo~~~

### BECOMING A WOMAN

Jay

Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in *The Second Sex*, "One is not born a woman, but becomes one". She was of course writing in a feminist context and probably gave not a thought to transsexualism, but her words ring true.

What I think she meant is that one may be born female (for some become female) but becoming a woman is more nurture than nature. A girl child is shaped by the wishes and demands of family and society to become the person others want, which is often neither natural nor instinctive. Daddy's little girl, Mummy's little angel is shaped by rules, regulations, encouragement, advice, punishment and rewards to hopefully grow up into that perfect woman. Siblings and older relatives all add their tuppence worth; teachers bring their ideals and standards. As the wider world opens, other pressures arise. Men very much want women to be pleasing to them and try to control them to that end. Employers tend to have different expectations of, and certainly different rewards for, male and female employees. The Church has never been woman friendly, marriage, child bearing and no sex outside marriage being the gold standard. The pressure is on - sit quietly, be good, dance prettily, dress nicely, diet, look good, be helpful, don't cause trouble, be nice, above all smile. Society requires women to be pleasing to others, especially men.

For men the situation is totally different. From when Man first set foot on earth, man has been regarded as the norm, woman as the other. Men have been encouraged to do what they want; apart from the push to find the right career or job and not misbehave too much on the way, the pressures are relatively light. Men by and large are very used to doing exactly what they want and, usually, trying very hard not to do what they don't want. Women on the other hand find that they have to put first the needs of others, especially where children are concerned, and must do that which needs doing rather than follow their own inclinations.

This pressure to conform, to look good, to be pleasing, diminishes but never stops. The media, friends, society, men, always manage to bring reminders. Women's magazines are very good at this – drop a dress size, look better for summer, latest diet, how to please your man etc. These influences may be trivial, often laughable, but they are persistent. Transsexuals are as subject to this as any natural born woman. Once you start living as a woman, you join the world of women and all that goes with it. How often in conversation does the subject of losing a few pounds come up? Of course you can recognise what is going on and can laugh and choose to ignore the pressure. However it is quietly there and very insistent; almost without noticing, you find yourself conforming. As every woman has

found, it simply makes life easier. There are things worth fighting for and others which are not. When you take a stand, it has to be for something really important; sometimes it just isn't worth the effort.

How does this affect individuality, personality, the imperative to "*Be yourself*"? The answer is not one bit. You remain individual, very much yourself. That need to really find and be yourself, in many ways the cornerstone of the faith life, remains vital and the real you is very much there - or should be. However your way of being yourself will of necessity adjust what Society requires of each gender.

As the years roll by, transsexuals tend to forget their gender transition. That was then; it was all a long time ago. Having joined the world of women, the longer you live there, the more at home you are; anything else is unthinkable. Once in a while something happens on your journey to bring you up short. It is at such moments that you realise that your reactions, your thinking, your interaction with people, your whole way of being, has become feminine. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote, you have become a woman. Moulded, persuaded, formed – but not born.

~~~oOo~~~

### **WHALEY HALL, 17-19 MAY 2013 - *Where two or three are gathered together...***

This time the lot had fallen to me to organise the spring weekend. Up to the last week it was touch-and-go; with a few days to spare the weekend went ahead with just four of us: it must be one of the smallest ever. I confess I chose the title with my tongue in my cheek; but of course, it is always appropriate.

I'd originally planned to set off early and arrive mid-afternoon to sort out details, but it became obvious I'd not get there before late afternoon. Would I beat the others? Debbie and Anthea were travelling by train, but I didn't know when they would arrive; a text arrived when I was en route, still about five miles from Whaley Bridge! ETA 1702. It's now 1640: good, time to check in first. But the front door was locked when I arrived! No point waiting here; I drove down to the Station to collect the others. I saw the train arrive – on time (surprise!) - from the footbridge. Debbie's luggage was fairly light, but Anthea's! Whatever is she carrying in her bags? I'd be struggling with them! Somehow I made space for passengers and baggage, and we set off back for Whaley Hall.

Yes, there was someone at home now! We were shown our rooms and left to get on with unpacking. I chose a room at the front with a view across the valley. Philippa arrived while I was unpacking. I offered her my room, but she wasn't bothered.

All here now; everything unpacked, so I went exploring before the evening meal. I'd already discovered that the old chapel, in the main house, had become a meeting room. I'd hoped we might be able to use the tiny crypt chapel that I'd loved so much last time, but the door's locked: it's definitely not in use this weekend. The Chapel is now where the Oratory was previously. The organ's been moved as well, and was playing loudly as I approached. I didn't go in; I can look tomorrow...

We'd a relaxing supper: plenty of pizza, and fresh fruit for afters. And now I discovered why Anthea had brought so much luggage. She produced enough wine for the whole weekend, plus a large chocolate cake. We finished that off in one go!

Debbie had offered to lead tonight's Office; she presented a short, beautifully-balanced service, ideal for the first night.

No need to move afterwards; we stayed in the lounge talking, but the wine stayed in the dining room: with care it should last all weekend. The kitchen's always open though, and we quickly found coffee. But it wasn't long before the others left for bed. I don't know

whether there's less to talk about, or that there are fewer young members on these weekends (I'm sure there are), but bedtime seems to get earlier and earlier...

Saturday dawned grey and misty, and there were low clouds over the hills on the opposite side of the valley. It didn't look very promising...

I was up early this morning, so I continued last night's exploration of the Chapel. The old Oratory has disappeared; the hidden cave I remember from the first candlelit evening in 2009 has been completely revamped. In its place is a light and airy chapel, now correctly facing east. The old benches have been replaced by comfortable chairs, but the familiar cross and the magnificent frontal are still here. Nevertheless, the old Chapel did have a certain eccentric charm...

After breakfast, we held the Morning Office in the Chapel; I led. I used the Office of Lauds that I would have used myself this morning; short and sweet... I **had** planned music, but it didn't happen. But this wasn't entirely my fault. The dynamics of a small group aren't the same as a larger one; there is no real leader and consequently too much democracy. I'm not one for putting my foot down!

We'd some time before coffee, so we decided to explore the hidden regions of the Chapel. Up several steps is a room; more a grotto, reminiscent of many old vestries and organ lofts, containing an assortment of church furniture, a number of homeless organ pipes and the huge organ itself that I'd heard last night. Can this be a remnant of the old Oratory? On one wall was an intriguing piece of engineering: the chimes for the clock; it would have done Heath Robinson proud! I **think** it was safe. Debbie was intrigued. Further investigation revealed yet more clockwork in an alcove beyond... It's not so warm here though, so we adjourned to the lounge, and coffee.

In earlier years there had been the legendary minibus outing, and no Saturday lunch. I was surprised when I realised that there **was** a lunch today: it should have been obvious! So, we had a couple of hours to plan our strategy for this afternoon...

We were startled by the sound of the great bell outside the window. This is free-standing in its own housing, and hand-rung using the same wheel that it must have had when rung by a rope; it's a delight watching Fr. Jamie start it off. We amused ourselves timing how long it took to die down, and discussing the physics of pendulums, as you do...

After a light lunch (mushroom soup; followed by salad and bread-and-cheese) we set off for the afternoon. We'd decided on Buxton: four of us in one car. The weather didn't promise much; we didn't see the spectacular views climbing out of the Goyt Valley, as the mist came down before we'd got far. We had mentioned and dismissed a visit to the Caverns, and we'd decided to go two-by-two instead. Debbie and Philippa wanted to see the Museum, and I opted to look at the shops with Anthea.

We didn't go to the shops first, but made our way to the Opera House, which was open; well, the foyer was, anyway. That's something, as neither of us had seen inside before. Then it was go-in-search-of-coffee time. We wandered through the Pavilion, and ignoring the restaurant, found a small café almost at its farthest reaches. Then suitably refreshed, and pausing on our way to watch the enterprising citizens of Buxton stocking up on free mineral water from the thermal spring several litres at a time (how much would you **pay** for mineral water?), we made our way back to the shops. It's pleasing to see that the Crescent is finally being restored as part of a new complex based around the Baths.

It always seems to rain when I go to Buxton. This time was no exception, and we spent most of our time sheltering in antique shop: a veritable Aladdin's Cave. I was tempted by some silver earrings; I resisted. There had been no call from the others yet, so we decided we'd time to glance at the shops. I got a lovely dress here last time. I wonder... Answer, yes; there was another that I liked in one of the many charity shops. And just time to try it. Of course, my mobile went off just when it was halfway on: *"We're ready; pick you*

*up soon...*" I know where my priorities lie: I want that dress! And we were just in time to meet the others; I see it's raining again...

On arriving back, we didn't go straight to the hall, but made a detour to look at the canal, a reminder of this region's almost-forgotten industrial past. I'd never been beyond the railway station in all my visits here, and I'd never realised that the Peak Forest Canal runs right into the town.

Later on we shared our experiences of the afternoon over dinner: a huge bowl of chicken-and-mushroom and more rice than we could handle! One advantage of a small group is that everyone can join in (that is, until the others start to talk shop...)

One **dis**advantage of such a small group is that the traditional Saturday evening's entertainments aren't really viable, so I'd brought a choice of DVDs plus a player (which proved unnecessary: I never knew that there was another small lounge behind the main room. How long has that been here, I wonder...) Then I trusted to democracy again. My two short DVDs were rejected in favour of the BBC's excellent dramatisation of *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*: well worth seeing, if you have three hours to spare. We hadn't...

We stayed in this small room for the Night Office. I'd prepared a version of Compline, taken this time from the *Common Worship* liturgy (with music, too); I was surprised how much longer it is than my own little bedtime office.

After the traditional time for Silence, we drifted back into the lounge.

Tonight wasn't another early night for me though. I wanted to have everything ready to take to the car before breakfast in an organised and panic-free manner!

Sunday dawned fine; I watched the first light on the hillside across the valley from my bed; not for long though: there's lots to do today. Last night's planning had paid off: after taking my luggage to the car I had time to look around before breakfast.

Philippa led Morning Office, a litany for Pentecost, in the Chapel, in spite of the cold weather. And once again, we were interrupted by the chimes of the clock. There must be a way to silence it!

We returned to the house in search of warmth and coffee. On previous weekends, Sunday morning is the time for Sibyls Together, the nearest thing we have to a Parliament, when we can discuss ideas and policies freely. I didn't see why our small numbers should make any difference this time. But this was more an informal discussion: about the changing position of trans people in society and of the churches' attitude. Are we becoming more accepted? How does this affect Sibyls? One thing we **didn't** discuss was possible future weekends; after this one, it's very much a wait-and-see area.

I'd timetabled the Communion for 1130, so we'd all assembled in the Chapel early. By 1135 there was no sign of Fr Jamie. Panic stations! I went back to the house on a frantic search... *Mea Culpa*: it's at 1200. Relax.

We spent a few minutes choosing readers and hymns; I left it to the others. We decided on a traditional Pentecost hymn: *Come down, O Love Divine*, and, of course, *Guide Me, O thou Great Jehovah*. Now this could be fun: we've no musical instruments, not even a tuning-fork. Our deliberations were interrupted by the sound of the Chapel bell, echoed in the distance by the deeper tone of the great bell near the house. Almost time to start.

The service followed the traditional Pentecost *Common Worship* liturgy we have used so often.

Helen and Philippa, spur-of the-moment volunteers, read from Genesis 11:1-8, and Exodus 19:3-8, 16-20. Fr Jamie read from Romans 8:22-27 and John 20:19-23. He reminded us in his talk that Pentecost is a time for renewal, and (referring to the Gospel reading) of our duty of forgiveness. He ended by wishing us all a happy Pentecost!

Our intercessions, as usual were open and personal. It hadn't proved practical to use candles, as we often do, but it didn't matter for once. Fr Jamie summed up by praying for Sibyls, and its witness.

After the Peace, not quite the great sharing we have had on the larger weekends, we sang the first hymn, *Come down, O Love Divine*. The others all looked at me for the note... Oh, help, my mind's gone blank! Eventually I plucked a note out of the air and started. It was a bit high, but nobody objected.

The Eucharist, like the Peace, was a small and intimate affair.

We finished the service with the "Sibyls' Hymn", *Guide Me, O thou Great Jehovah*. I found the note more easily this time; too low, as it happened. I need more practice (or that tuning-fork!)

Our tidying-up was interrupted by the sound of the clock: I only realised that it had been silent throughout the service. Fr Jamie obviously knows the secret!

But now our time together was coming to an end. It had stayed dry, so we were able to meet outside before lunch for the group photograph. This time we all fitted on one bench! Sunday lunch is usually a time for talking to people we might have missed earlier, a time for goodbyes and exchanging of addresses. But we had had plenty of time for that already, and Debbie and Anthea had a train to catch.

The four other guests left together in Philippa's car, leaving me on my own. I needed to wait for the staff: I had to organise payment, and I wasn't in a hurry anyway. After some time talking, I said my own goodbyes, and prepared to leave.

Will we return? I made no firm promises. Whaley Hall has always been good value, if a little haphazard. I'd like to think there will be a viable weekend here again soon...

~~~oOo~~~

... and finally, an amusing anecdote

### **I'm tired of looking at all the BEERY WENCHES**

Raymus Bowerbank

I myself am originally from Scarborough up in North Yorkshire, although I settled in Brighton in 1985.

There is a village just outside Scarborough called Newby. Although a fairly small village, the Church there, Newby Parish Church, is fairly large. I never worshipped there myself; in the '70s I was very active in the local Pentecostal Church, but via the local church "circuit" I heard things about other churches in the area.

The vicar at Newby Parish Church had a habit of mispronouncing certain words and phrases. He had been told about this a few times by his Curate.

This was yet another occasion. He had meant to say: "I wish more people would come to Church. I'm tired of looking at all the WEARY BENCHES." What did he say? (yes, you have guessed) "I'm tired of looking at all the BEERY WENCHES."

I would like to add also that this particular Church has another little "claim to fame". A long time ago someone took a photograph there. He claimed it showed a ghost kneeling, praying at the altar. He was even able to sell it to various books about British ghosts. It was later found to be a hoax: it was in fact the Church cleaner!

~~~oOo~~~



# THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People



12 Ffordd Las  
Rhyl  
Denbighshire  
LL18 2DY

☎ 01745 337144

## WEEKEND AT THE WINDERMERE CENTRE 16-18 MAY 2014

Name.....

Required - Single/twin room (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant in room .....

Willing to share with .....

Address.....

.....

.....

Telephone No .....

Email address .....

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Full weekend Friday night to Sunday lunch £ 145.00 .....

Other (please specify): .....

*If you are not coming for the full weekend please telephone on the number above regarding costs.*

Cheque payable to "Miss J Walmsley - The Sibyls" enclosed.....£.....

Any special dietary requirements? .....

Any other special needs? .....

Do you need help with transport? .....

Can you offer a lift to someone? .....

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