



SIBYLS NEWS

THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People

BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

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

To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. *Isaiah 9:6*

*Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
all for love's sake becomest poor,
thrones for a manger didst surrender
sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
all for love's sake becomest poor.*

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

It is with great sadness that I have to record the death of Diana Marshall. Please remember the family and friends of Diana in your prayers.

We also remember all those 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 any kind of need, and those with disabilities or who are suffering from physical or emotional pain.

I have recently had some posted Newsletters returned with "*addressee unknown*" and some emailed Newsletters have been undeliverable.

Please do keep me informed of changes of contact details.

Thank you to all who help to keep cost down by receiving the Newsletter by email.
Please let me know (rosie@sibyls.co.uk) 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.

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### **Rosie's Jottings**

Unfortunately this is a rather thin Newsletter as I have received very little input. **PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE** do remember that this is **YOUR** Newsletter and most of the content is therefore dependent upon your contributions. Please send any items for inclusion to me at [rosie@sibyls.co.uk](mailto:rosie@sibyls.co.uk) or by post to Mrs Rosie Martin, 1 Woodruff Close, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4UN. My telephone number is 01425 270 540. I will be compiling the next Newsletter towards the end of February 2012 so anything with an Easter theme would be particularly welcome.

Carol has written a personal note in memory of Gerry Ellis whose death was recorded in the last Newsletter. I met Gerry on a couple of occasions and found him to be just as kind and gentle as Carol says. Thank you Carol.

Deirdre sent me a very interesting email about something she saw in the Church Times which seems to me to present an interesting perspective on sex and gender.

Carol has provided an interesting short report on the September Holland House weekend and Andrea has sent in her thoughtful observations of that weekend within the context of her own journey of discovery.

Jan has submitted a twist on an age-old story under the title of '*Thought for the Day?*'. You may have seen this before, but I found very humorous it certainly made me think!

I have written a short piece about transitioning in prison which I hope may provoke some reaction and response and finally Raymus has sent me a great Christmas story.

My thanks are also due to the two Sibyls members who responded to my note in the last Newsletter regarding the future of Sibyls. It would be helpful if more members could let me know either by post or email if they have any thoughts about Sibyls and especially any proposals for informal gatherings at locations other than London and Manchester. Remember that Sibyls is primarily a Christian Spirituality group for transgender people and any planned events should therefore have a Christian focus. Hopefully I will have something to report in the next Newsletter.

Please remember that there is just ONE weekend currently being arranged for next year - in May at the Windermere Centre. The booking form is attached and I hope that many members will give serious consideration to booking what I am sure will be a wonderful weekend. The Windermere Centre is a very welcoming place of peace and tranquillity and is set in the midst of some of the most breathtaking scenery in the British Isles. If you have Internet access you can look at the facilities at <http://windermere.urc.org.uk/>.

The cost of the weekend is £135 and it could be some members feel that they cannot afford to come. Please do remember that a fund is available to help in such circumstances so please do phone Jay on 020 8763 0146 and discuss your situation with her in complete confidence. We really do want all members to feel they are able to fully participate and the weekends provide a valuable opportunity to meet with old friends and make new friends as we gather together in total security and freedom. Please do not be left out simply because you feel you cannot afford to come.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a joyous and happy Christmas and may 2012 be a healthy and happy one for you all.

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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 | Jane Bowles | 01492 660 147 |
| Carol Moore | 01625 858 487 | Jenny-Anne Bishop | 01745 337 144 |
| Helen Mather | 0115 922 6450 | Jay Walmsley | 020 8763 0146 |

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### WEEKENDS

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2012

Windermere Centre, Lake District  
(application form attached to this Newsletter)

*September 2012*

*no weekend currently planned*

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Whaley Hall, Whaley Bridge, Derbyshire

*September 2013*

*no weekend currently planned*

### 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. Future dates are: 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011, and for 2012: 9<sup>th</sup> February, 12 April, 14<sup>th</sup> June, 9<sup>th</sup> August, 11<sup>th</sup> October and 13<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 Church's 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 the main website (<http://ufmcc.com/>) for contact details.

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

**BRIGHTON:** Dorset Gardens Methodist Church, Dorset Gardens, Brighton, BN2 1RL, 01273 605 502 ([www.dgmc.org.uk](http://www.dgmc.org.uk)) welcomes all regardless of age, gender, race or sexual orientation.

**OXFORD:** St Columba's United Reformed Church, Alfred Street, Oxford, OX1 4EH, welcomes all to their Sunday service at 10.45 (see <http://www.saintcolumbas.org/>)

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

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

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Brief personal note in memory of Gerry Ellis

Carol

I was really shocked to learn from the last Newsletter that Gerry had died, for I may well have been the last member of Sibyls to have conversed with him, but had not heard the news.

We used to meet occasionally when I had spare time on a trip to London. He used to come in by train and we would eat in the crypt of St Martin's-in-the-Fields, and compare notes. This acquaintance had begun at St Columba's in Woking, when he was almost overcome by the vipers' nest of personal, gender and sexual problems which he faced. He was one of the kindest and gentlest people you could wish to meet, which made it seem especially cruel that life was so hard for him.

He battled courageously on, however, and was definitely coming to a place of greater comfort and serenity over the years that I knew him. He had been a professional jazz percussionist, but forsook that lifestyle in his quest for spiritual peace. He expressed his musical talent by taking up the violin, on which he was making very rapid progress. When we last met, he was a member of a local orchestra, was making more new friends, and finding, I think, love. I hope his last months were happy ones.

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### **Seen in the Church Times**

**Deirdre**

I saw this little piece in the *Church Times* dated 9th September. It was contributed by the Revd Robert Mackley, a research student at the University of Cambridge:

'One college Women's Officer sent this email recently: "Dear All: To clarify the message in the bulletin, most women will automatically be on the women's mailing list. However, if you are male but self-define as female then you will not be on the list. Anyone who self-defines as a woman is welcome to join the women's mailing list regardless of their actual sex - if you would like to do so, please contact me."'

*Copyright © The Church Times, 2011*

Interestingly, he adds that this might suggest a way forward in the debate about the ordination of women!

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Holland House 16th to 18th September

Carol

Advance bookings for this weekend were not sufficient to take the whole house, so a select band of Sibyls shared the weekend with two other small groups of delightful people. Such lack of exclusivity does, I know, cause discomfort for some members, but I think it is worth saying that at no time were we made in any way to feel 'different', by staff or guests. Rather it was a wholly positive experience.

The more normal routines of a Sibyls weekend were loosened up for this small gathering, (8 of us), but we owe a debt of gratitude to Jenny-Anne, Elen and Elaine, who all provided a sense of direction, and in effect gave us something to talk about, by their several initiatives. A major topic for us was the way in which an older transgendered person might expect to be treated if obliged to go into care. This of course suggests the skewed age distribution of the group, but in no way invalidates the general arguments made, as it affects potentially all of us. We learnt of the ceaseless work which Jenny-Anne does in campaigning and consciousness-raising, discussed its effect and its value, and we exchanged the Saturday night cabaret for a film shown by Elaine on the campaigns against Christian Fundamentalist bigotry in the U.S.A. Myself, I find it puzzling how some of the demagogic hate-merchants who pass themselves off as preachers of the word of God, especially on television, have the nerve to call themselves Christians. I cannot believe that they ever ask themselves what Christ would have said. It was strong stuff, and very affecting.

On the Saturday afternoon we had split up to have time off doing ordinary holiday-type things. Four of us went to Hidcote Manor, a very famous National Trust garden on the top of the Cotswold scarp. We were caught in an epic thunderstorm, but our spirits were not at all diminished, as the garden is truly inspiring. When we arrived at the point where the plain is revealed below, stretching far out to the West, we knew why we had come. It also struck me forcibly how happy it was to be doing something together which was not in any way relevant to gender! Thank you to Anthea, Jan and Janet for the company.

We all felt that it had been well worth coming; indeed it is likely that Solveig and Anthea both felt more comfortable with a small group than they might have done in a larger gathering. Anthea expressed her great enjoyment of the time - when someone is so positive it makes you feel good. And it was really wonderful that Janet said how much she had enjoyed herself. She had had an absolutely horrid and exhausting journey to reach Holland house, using public transport, so she deserved to. What spirit! If I reach 90, I hope I will be even half as strong in character.

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### **Anthea's Story - Holland House 16-18 September 2011**

**Anthea**

Over fifty years ago I had declared myself to be an agnostic but still retaining a respect for the church. Anthea started to emerge in the spring of 2010 after I gained freedom when my mother had sadly to move into care. Once accepted into the trans community I found friendship and support of a quality I had not before experienced. I met a number of good Christians and realised that I was more likely to reconnect with Christ through the transgender community than I was through my former life.

Half way through a somewhat tedious course of radiotherapy for prostate cancer I initiated a chain of telephone calls round the TG world, the last through a pagan, until I was introduced to Jenny Anne Bishop who told me about the nearly cancelled Holland House retreat. A room was found and my arrival was made easier with a lift from Elaine Sommers and her wife. I had met Elaine earlier in the year when we both were in attendance on Henry VIII at one of Danielle's feasts. I did not then know of her Christian connections.

Holland House is a beautiful half timbered thatched house surrounded by fine gardens (possibly designed by Lutyens) adjoining the river Avon between Evesham and Pershore. It has a conference room and bedroom block together with a Chapel all built in the 1960s. and can now accommodate 40 visitors.

The Sibyls group of eight was only one of several in residence all seeking spiritual renewal. My trans career had developed sufficiently for me to be completely at home and relaxed in this environment. A year ago this would not have been so and I would have needed a more sheltered atmosphere with only trans people present.

I now saw the need to quietly affirm that the Sibyls were just like other Christians and not to be feared or shunned. I was privileged to be a part of that witness. The Sibyls dined round one table on plentiful food with local vegetables.

#### The discussions

I was invited to present my story, which I had previously submitted to Jenny Anne as a confession of how I came to be there. Jenny Anne had turned the text into a PowerPoint presentation and allocated me an hour to discuss it. I invited the rest of the group to interrupt at any time and talk about their own related experiences. The leitmotif of the session was '*You are not alone*'; by joining the trans community one discovers that one's experience is not unique.

Elaine provided a very powerful American TV film '*For the Bible tells me so*' showing the Evangelical wing treats a Gay person as an 'abomination'. The same brush was used to tar the transgendered as well. The scriptural basis was weak and we are all God's children. We need to be armed with material to dispute with those who see no place for trans people.

On the Saturday evening I suddenly thought 'I have been short-changed, where is the Bible Bashing'. There was none.

Compline in the Chapel prepared us for the Communion Service on Sunday morning led by Jenny Anne with music by Elaine which was the climax of the retreat. I was moved to see out of the East window of the Chapel a long straight Silver Road, rather straighter than John Bunyan would have seen.

What emerged was a need to follow the precepts of Our Lord and walk in his footsteps.

Agnosticism was not instantly banished but I know good Christians, scientists, who could not honestly say that God exists.

I am not one to cry out that '*I am saved*', but slowly a sense of humility developed a need to provide conciliation. A realisation that Trans people must accept the fears of others and work by example rather than evangelism. It was gratifying to find that the experience allowed me to give spiritual help to those who had helped me.

Without persuading many more people to follow Christ the world will not be pulled out of its abyss. It is difficult to know whether a minority which is feared and rejected by many should proceed by example or by evangelism.

I wrote to my Rector and explained my situation on a one to one basis; she was supportive and understanding. There was a NIMPC (not in my parish church) and I understood the fragile nature of the bonds which hold a Church together. I would not wish to intrude on her flock. I have found the Wellspring Metropolitan Community Church in Bath and felt welcome and at ease.

Without succumbing to the sin of pride I hope I have become more compassionate and forgiving.

I hope that all the other members of the retreat can gain strength from the changes that have been wrought in me.

#### A secular postscript

I am a member of a Patient Participation Group which works with our NHS General practice. On two occasions I tried to suggest that there was no 'patient confidentiality' and that the minutes could be published. I was outvoted unanimously on both occasions. When we came to adopt the minutes fresh discussion ensued, I said we may have made hasty and unwise remarks 'off the record' which our faithful secretary had dutifully transcribed.

We could ask for these to be expunged when the minutes came up for approval. It was our fault that they had been made in the first place. Result: previous vote unanimously reversed.

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Thought for the Day?

Jan

"Lord, I have a problem."

"What's the problem, Eve?"

"I know that you created me and provided this beautiful garden and all of these wonderful animals, as well as that hilarious comedic snake, but I'm just not happy."

"And why is that Eve?"

"Lord, I am lonely, and I'm sick to death of apples."

"Well, Eve, in that case, I have a solution. I shall create a man for you."

"Man? What is that Lord?"

"A flawed creature, with many bad traits. He'll lie, cheat and be vain; all in all, he'll give you a hard time. But he'll be bigger, faster and will like to hunt and kill things. He will look silly when he is aroused, but since you've been complaining, I'll create him in such a way that he will satisfy your physical needs. He will be witless and will revel in childish things like fighting and kicking a ball about. He won't be too smart, so he will also need your advice to think properly."

"Sounds great," says Eve, with ironically raised eyebrows, "but what's the catch Lord?"

"Well ... you can have him on one condition."

"And what's that Lord?"

"As I said, he'll be proud, arrogant and self-admiring ... so you'll have to let him believe that I made him first. And it will have to be our little secret. ... You know, woman to woman."

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### **Transitioning in Prison**

**Rosie**

Over the past year or so I have received three requests for help and support for people about to start transitioning whilst serving a prison sentence. So far I have responded by telling them something about Sibyls and apologising for not being able to offer any direct assistance. My reason for this approach has been primarily to ensure that our members security is protected especially as all three requests have concerned prisoners serving life sentences.

However, I have to admit that this has often concerned me especially when we recall the words of Jesus: 'I was in prison and you came to visit me', (*Matthew 25:36, NIV*), and I therefore wonder whether we should have a discussion about if and how we might be able to offer some help.

Those of us who are going through or have gone through the process of transitioning will be only too aware of the problems and difficulties to be faced so I for one cannot even begin to imagine how much more difficult it would be for a person serving a prison sentence.

Whilst the words of Jesus are a reminder to us all of our Christian duty to support people in all kinds of need, I am **NOT** suggesting that anyone offer to visit! However, I wonder if anyone would be interested in being a pen friend to a prisoner? It would not be necessary to use a full name, a Christian name would be sufficient, and we already have a Box Number address through which correspondence could be directed.

If anyone is interested, perhaps you could contact me and we can discuss details. I would also be interested in any other ideas for offering help and support to prisoners.

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Christmas at Brighton General Hospital

Raymus

Brighton Gnereal Hospital is not too far from where I live. Towards the Christmas period, a local radio station team visited the place as they had heard about tales of a ghost who was said to have been a surgeon when the hospital was opened over a century ago.

People said they had seen him walking across the wards and down the corridors late at night. He was always wearing his surgical gown, cap and gloves and carried a stethoscope.

As you know, many reporters are extremely sceptical and hard-nosed about this sort of thing and one of them asked the hospital chaplain "do you really believe all this rubbish about a ghost?", He replied: "Yes. I have seen him, he's our SURGICAL SPIRIT!"

THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People



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WEEKEND AT THE WINDERMERE CENTRE, Friday 18th – Sunday 20th May 2012

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 £135.00

Other (please specify):

*If you are not coming for the full weekend please telephone Elen
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 to The Windermere Centre?

Can you offer a lift to someone?

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