



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

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:
If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up!

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep
warm alone? *Ecclesiastes 4.9-11 (NIV)*

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 those who are contemplating or recovering from surgery,
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.

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

Thank you to all who have provided input for this edition of the Newsletter, I hope you all find something of interest.

Congratulations to Tina Beardsley, Michelle O'Brien and Jasmine Woolley on the publication of their paper: *Exploring the Interplay: The Sibyls' "Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality" Workshop* in the peer-reviewed journal *Theology and Sexuality*.

Jay chaired the Sibyls Together meeting at the recent Windermere weekend when several important items were discussed especially with regard to some changes in the near future. Jay has also provided some very helpful notes which are reproduced below.

As a follow on from this meeting, Anthea is trying to organise a retreat this coming autumn and has provided some details and an idea of cost. **BUT** the event can only take place if sufficient people wish to attend, so please do let Anthea or Jenny-Anne know **as soon as possible** if you are likely to be able to go.

It could be that you would like to attend a weekend but would find the cost prohibitive. We have funds available to help in such circumstances so do phone Jay on 020 8763 0146 and discuss your situation with her in complete confidence. We really 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.

Sibyls has been approached about a television documentary on transgender marriage. I am sure that most of us are very wary of such programmes as they can often do more harm than good. However, I have spoken with Nina and she seems to be someone who really does want to help so details are given below should anyone wish to respond.

Deirdre very kindly responded to my request for material in the last Newsletter and has provided us with a very moving and thought-provoking piece entitled 'Least said ...'. Thank you very much Dierdre.

I recently came across an article in *Mathematics Today* about some research on faces that led to being able to take a photograph of a person and then show them what they might look like as the opposite sex. I thought it might be of interest so I have included a précis of the article and a picture to show a typical result.

Finally, 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 either by email to [rosie@sibyls.co.uk](mailto:rosie@sibyls.co.uk) or by post to Mrs Rosie Martin, 1 Woodruff Close, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4UN.

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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 | 01115 922 6450 | Jay Walmsley | 020 8763 0146 |

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

|                                                            |                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Saturday 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2012                         | Jay's Garden Party (please let Jay know if you are hoping to attend). |
| Autumn 2012                                                | see Anthea's article below                                            |
| Friday 17 <sup>th</sup> – Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2013 | Whaley Hall, Whaley Bridge, Derbyshire                                |
| <i>Autumn 2013</i>                                         | <i>Whalley Abbey, Clitheroe, Lancashire</i>                           |
| Friday 16 <sup>th</sup> – Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> May 2014 | The Windermere Centre, Windermere, Cumbria                            |
| <i>Autumn 2014</i>                                         | <i>St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Flintshire</i>                     |

## 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 in 2012: 9<sup>th</sup> August, 11<sup>th</sup> October and 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 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 <http://ufmcc.com/> for contact details.

**CARDIFF:** City United Reform 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 (<http://www.saintcolumbas.org/>), Alfred Street, Oxford, OX1 4EH, Sunday service at 10.45

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

**LONDON:** St Luke's Parish Church (<http://www.chelseaparish.org/>), Sydney Street, London, SW3 6NH, 020 7351 7365.

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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SIBYLS TOGETHER AT WINDERMERE 20 MAY 2012

Jay

Jay was asked by Elen to chair the meeting. She explained that Sibyls Together was the opportunity for Sibyls to make their input in deciding the way forward for the group.

1. Everyone had thoroughly enjoyed the weekend at Windermere, the house was comfortable, the staff helpful, and the food excellent. The film had been enjoyed. The meeting thanked Elen and Jenny-Anne for all their work in arranging the weekend and for an excellent job well done. They were given a round of applause.
2. In view of the drop in numbers attending, there was doubt about future weekends at Windermere. Discussions had been held with the Director and he assured us that

provided we had a minimum of eight, they would continue to support us and give us exclusive occupation. The meeting very much wanted to continue and so Elen agreed to run it. The date of the next Windermere booking is confirmed as 16-18 May 2014. Sibyls are asked to book early, as soon as the booking form is out, so that we may be sure of the numbers.

3. There was much discussion about future weekends with some Sibyls wanting small open weekends as well as the main exclusive weekends. Helen would investigate Whalley Abbey, near Clitheroe. The proposed programme is as follows:-
 - i. Whaley Hall (www.whaleyhall.com/) 17-19 May 2013 Rachael Ridley
 - ii. Whalley Abbey (www.whalleyabbey.co.uk/) Autumn 2013 Helen Mather
 - iii. Windermere (www.windermere.unc.org.uk/) 16-18 May 2014 Elen Heart
 - iv. St Deiniol's (www.st-deiniols.com/) Autumn 2014 Jenny-Anne

If Whalley Abbey proves a non-starter, then Jenny-Anne will try to bring forward the Autumn 2014 at St Deiniol's to Autumn 2013.

4. Jay made a personal statement on behalf of Rosie Martin. Rosie is moving on and no longer felt able to relate to transition problems as she once had. She wished to relinquish her duties, preferably by the end of the year. These are: point of contact, keeping the membership list, newsletter editor and distribution, and web mistress.
5. Jay too made a personal statement. She too had realised that she was very distant from transition and that events and techniques had moved on. She had realised that Sibyls would be best served by people who were in transition or had recently completed it. They were the ones who hurt, who faced the problems, and knew what they wanted to do something about. While she had thought of helping out, she realised this was actually a bad idea. She would be there if needed but was not prepared to take a lead role. She also made clear that while she may have founded Sibyls, it would not be a matter of personal concern if there came a time for it to be wound up.
6. Both statements were discussed and volunteers stepped forward readily. Helen Mather would be happy to take on the newsletter. Subject to being able to sort out her personal circumstances, which is not a given, Philippa Whittaker would do point of contact, membership list and web mistress.
7. Rachael Ridley kindly said that she would like to take on the Whaley Hall weekend.
8. Publicity for the group was discussed. It had been noted that Russell Reid had been a good recruiting sergeant for the Sibyls. Members were asked to discuss this with their own psychiatrist and ask them to mention Sibyls to those of their clients looking for religious help. It was also felt that there was a need for a handout leaflet to be available as needed.
9. Carol asked if we could accommodate those of other faiths. They were of course always welcome. Practical ideas to extend the work of Sibyls would be welcomed.
10. Carol also mentioned that if anyone was looking for a safe place to stay while they sorted out themselves and their way forward, they would be very welcome at her remote home in mid Wales.

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## **AUTUMN RETREAT**

**Anthea**

At Windermere in the final session the possibility of an autumn retreat was raised. I have had various discussions with Jenny-Anne and Elen and there seems to be interest. I have landed the job of trying to find participants.

Date: Weekend Friday + Saturday night either 26-27 October or 9-10 November at the moment the November date is preferred.

Open meeting: If there only 3 or so people Jenny-Anne has offered to make their Community House available but as we seem to have more interest than that, Jenny Anne would find a retreat House for which we would be one group amongst other occupants. At Windermere people seemed to be happy with this as an alternate arrangement.

Location: Jenny Anne suggests St Deinols at Hawardwen (Gladstone's Library) about 15 miles west of Chester, with an alternative Luther King House in Manchester.

Cost: The only cost would be accommodation and hire of meeting room. Subject to other groups we should be able to use the Chapel. See <http://www.st-deinols.com/> for typical conference rates so probably about £150 per person. It may be possible to negotiate a lower rate depending upon numbers. Public transport is not impossible: train to Chester then bus or train to Shotton.

Jenny-Anne would be happy to lead the group, but it would be great if someone else would like to take on the Weekend with Anthea & Jenny-Anne's support. The format would be as per typical Sibyls weekend.

If you are interested **please let us know as soon as possible**. You can you contact either: Jenny-Anne by email at [jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk) or on 01745 337 144, or me by email at [makepeaceanthony@yaho.co.uk](mailto:makepeaceanthony@yaho.co.uk) or on 01275 853 283.

Looking forward to a successful weekend.

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Television Documentary about Transgender Marriages

Sibyls has received the following email from Nina Lowes, Associate Producer at Electric Sky Productions Ltd. (www.electricskyproductions.tv):

After the positive responses to last years 'My Transsexual Summer' on C4 which increased public awareness, we've been asked to develop a documentary about transgender relationships to explore in more detail the issues couples still face in the UK.

I have spoken to transgender couples who have married at supportive Churches and I believe that a documentary focused on an up and coming wedding/ civil partnership would offer a portrait of the challenges the couple experiences, the perception of their forthcoming marriage by the outside world, as well as celebrate the wedding.

I feel weddings/ civil partnerships are particularly interesting because they are a time to assemble all the people who have been supportive to the couple and make a statement to the world – here we are, take us or leave us. Plus it would also be a platform in which to discuss marriage gender inequalities.

It would be hugely appreciated if you could please assist me in sending out information to members who might be keen to tell their stories and highlight the issues that transgender people come up against.

There is no obligation for people to take part and it would just be lovely to chat to couples who might like to share their advice on the documentary.

I have spoken with Nina and she is genuinely interested in trying to overcome the public perception of transgender issues in general and marriage in particular. If you would like to participate or simply contribute, please telephone Nina on 01273 229 660 or contact her by email at nina.lowes@electricsky.com.

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One of the stranger elements of English humour is the fact that we often find ourselves laughing at what has *not* been said. This has to be carefully prepared; the late Kenneth Horne was the absolute master of such skilful innuendo. Visually, there is also enormous potential for comedy in diverting expectations in a totally unexpected direction, so that we laugh at what has *not* happened - the better episodes of *Last of the Summer Wine* remain as notable examples. But there is another side to this: that some things simply cannot be said or done because of circumstances. For many TVs, it's a kind of isolation.

In society today a greater acceptance of differing expressions of sexuality is gradually emerging, although there is still some way to go before a TV can easily feel welcome in most settings. It's now more than seven years since Deirdre was last seen on the street; a more enlightened view of such ventures has yet to be achieved. At present I find myself in a setting in which engaging in any TV activity is frustrated, not only in longing for acceptance but not being able to give the real self any kind of expression. Instead of being able to relax into the soft and comforting embrace of feminine clothing, I watch the inexorable advance of one of the more challenging neurological disorders gradually diminishing the personality of a dear wife of over forty years.

A further element in this is the intrusion of dreams. It happens that the frustrated longing for feminine expression merges into half-remembered professional responsibilities from past years that can bring fearful confusion. The gap between what I want to take and what I must give widens until one becomes the bridge that crosses the void between the yearning for personal fulfilment in deep expressions of self and the pleading eyes that betray another request for assistance. There's a certain irony in being able to share the skills learned about feminine essence in one way, which of necessity are finding expression in another. So far no embarrassing enquiries have sought to clarify this!

Would it not be easier to bring this out into the open? If one is given the duties of a nurse / carer and housewife, could one not dress for the part? Many years ago there was an exchange between my wife and me, prompted by her realisation of my engagement with the TV world; it was fierce, totally uncompromising and quite unforgettable. Present circumstances do not provide a suitable setting to risk such a confrontation again. It would, after all, in a single moment destroy the immense privilege that such intimate nursing support can bring.

Such thoughts were intruding into my thinking in the Good Friday service when my minister spoke of bearing the cross. The cross of Christ is of course central, and the Gospel record reminds us that we all have to take up our cross; this might take any number of different forms. In the story of the crucifixion an important contribution was made by "... a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross". Nothing else is known of him, except that he briefly relieved Christ's burden. It led me to think that I was in danger of allowing a degree of what for many would be questionable self-indulgence to get in the way of what is obviously my present task - to make real the love of Christ through my care and through what will thus become possible for her. That, essentially, is its own reward and is more than merely a practical exercise. The hymn by Richard Gillard catches the situation succinctly: *Brother, Sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you.*

There is a legend of a Fourth Wise Man, named Artaban, who wanted to bring three jewels to add to the gifts of the Magi to be offered to the infant Jesus. But his attempts to join them were interrupted. One jewel was given to a sick man at the roadside to pay for treatment, one was given as a bribe to save the life of a baby boy in danger from Herod's soldiers, and the third to redeem a girl from slavery. The rest of his life was spent searching for the King, whom he eventually encountered on the road to Calvary. On the face of Jesus were three drops of blood, like jewels.

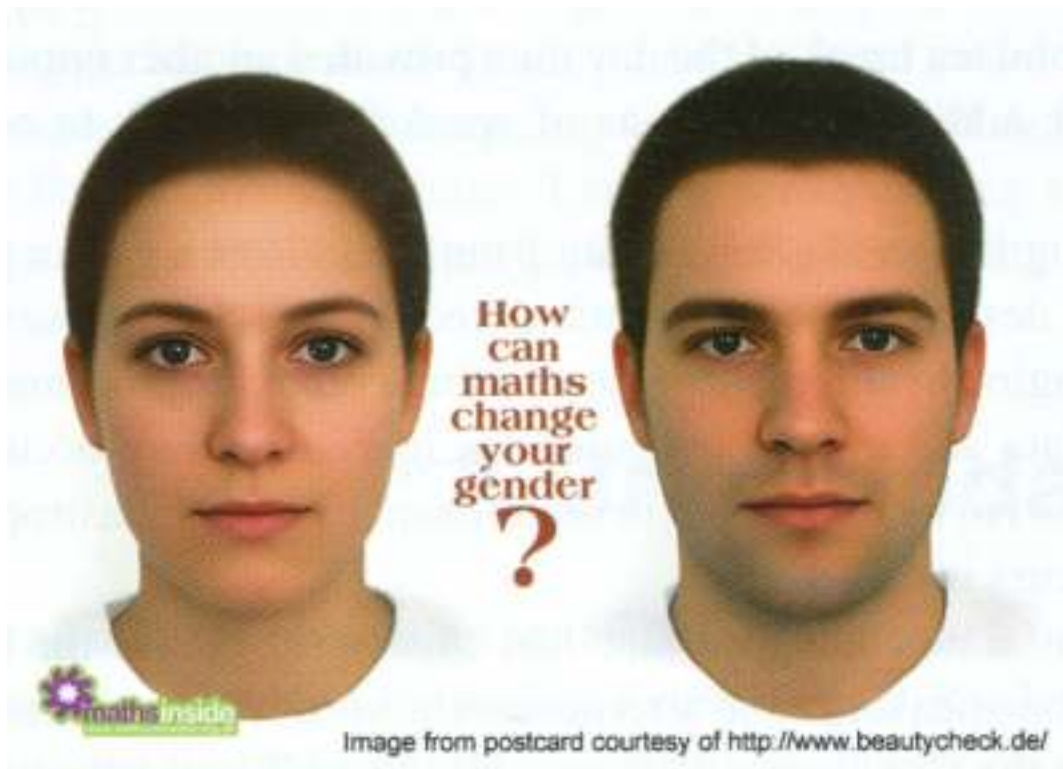
Perhaps there is, after all, more value than expected in something remaining unsaid, and ventures remaining undone.

## Face to Face

How would you like to look in a mirror and rather than see your own reflection, see how you would look as the opposite sex? Professor Peter McOwan and his colleagues from Queen Mary, University of London and University College London used mathematical wizardry to produce gender-reversed images of faces at last year's Royal Society Summer Exhibition.

Despite the crisp clear details and blended colours, a photograph is just a series of dots, called pixels, of different colours. Any digital photograph is represented in a computer as a long string of numbers, each representing the colour at a particular pixel. Just as a string of three numbers marks a point in three-dimensional space, so a string of N numbers sits in what mathematicians think of as N-dimensional space: so mathematically a photograph can be thought of as a point in an N-dimensional space, where N is the number of pixels in the photograph.

Thousands of photos were used to establish a female and a male face space showing how faces differ from other faces of the same gender. Then using a statistical technique called principal component analysis, Professor McOwan and his colleagues produced a face space in which each face is represented by a string of just 20 numbers which correspond to the 20 coordinates that describe how that face differs from the average face with respect to each of 20 principal components.



See [www.cs4fn.org/faces/](http://www.cs4fn.org/faces/) for more information about this research and the Facing up to Faces exhibit.

*(Editors note: I contacted Professor McOwan and suggested that he might like to look at producing an application for gender clinics to enable those proposing to transition to get some idea of how they might appear post-transition. He thanked me for pointing him towards an application that he had not thought of!)*

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I was unable to be at the Windermere Weekend so I would like to thank Jay for presenting my personal statement at the Sibyls Together meeting.

I joined Sibyls in November 2002 and I still vividly remember how nervous and vulnerable I felt as I telephoned Jay to seek some guidance. Much has happened in my life over the past 10 years, not least receiving the necessary therapy and treatment to fully become the person I have always felt I was, and throughout that time Sibyls has been there to provide the support, help and guidance I needed just when I needed it most. I will owe an eternal debt of gratitude to Sibyls and to many individual members who have played a significant role in helping me through my transition and I offer you all my grateful thanks for that.

Despite the losses I have suffered both during and because of this journey of self-discovery, I now find that for the first time in my life I am totally at peace with who I am. I am now able to relate to people in a way that was almost impossible before and I have become much more involved in my local community where I regularly go Ballroom dancing and also act as a volunteer driver for hospital visits and as a lay preacher in my local United Reformed Church.

But more than that, what has truly surprised me is my increasing inability to relate to trans issues. Every day I move another day forward in my life as Rosie and another day away from my former life as a transgendered person. In other words, my perspective on life has changed dramatically and I feel I can no longer offer the sort of help and support that Sibyls members deserve nor do I feel that Sibyls can offer me the support that I now need.

I am grateful that Helen is willing to take over the production and distribution of the Newsletter and hopefully Philippa will be able to act as point of contact and web mistress and also maintain the membership list in the near future.

I honestly believe that I could not have reached this point in my life without Sibyls, but I also believe that the time has now come for me to move on.

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Just for fun ... (I hope no one is offended)

