



SIBYLS NEWS



Issue No. 71 March 2015 LENT & EASTER



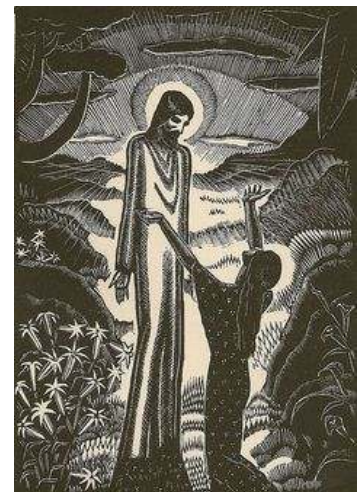
The Fight Between Carnival and Lent by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1569). The subject is the threshold between two cycles in the liturgical calendar, the moment when the last feast of winter must give way to Lenten fasting.

It might seem that for some the fight was won by carnival: —————>

Is Lent going the same way as Christmas and Easter in our society?



This is where Lent should be leading.....



THE SIBYLS
Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People
BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

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

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

Apologies. There is a **CORRECTION RE SOHO MASSES**

Soho Masses no longer meet at Warwick St. , London, as stated in issue 69.

St James, Piccadilly has an LGBT Group which meets for lunch on the 2nd Sunday.

www.sohomasses.com has details. Please see also page 4 for our own Soho meetings.

EDITORIAL

This issue contains many extra pages of news from the wider trans community. It is not specifically Sibyls news; it is included because I thought it was time to look at the way in which society in the West is fracturing. There is a huge improvement in the level of acceptance and openness towards trans people, but not in all quarters. Needless to say the more violent extremes are found in the U.S.A., where amazing contrasts in attitudes can be seen. I've also included quite a lot about the U.K. Green Party's travails on the subject, as it seems to show the main underlying themes with less vitriol. Fundamentalism *may* be losing ground, but it isn't spent yet; and it isn't the only problem. There are sincere as well as cynical motives driving many opponents of transgender expression; we need to respect such serious concerns and work them through.

I SHALL NOT REPEAT THIS FEATURE UNLESS I AM POSITIVELY ASKED TO. There is no point in doing the work if no-one likes it. Few responded to my earlier requests for feedback on the newsletter. Please **do** tell me your judgements.

carol.nixon2012@btinternet.com 01974 821295

Please keep the comments and articles coming! Feel free to use a nom de plume if it helps with security.

Very short contributions (e.g. 100 words) are welcomed and will be published.

Controversy and argument are very welcome. And thank you for the items already received.

Planned 2015 Newsletter issue dates and a few possible topics are below, but there's no need to stick rigidly to these. Personal stories are always welcome, whatever the topic.

Issue date	12th June	Copy date	5th June	topic:	Chris Dowd's detailed results. (see Issue 67)
	10th Sept		5th Sept		What is the nature of forgiveness? Grace versus rules.
	10th December		5th Dec		Are psychiatrists any help? + Legal matters.

N.B.

Adjoa Andoh on raising a transboy - link to download a fine talk from the radio

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/fourthought/fourthought_20140730-2100a.mp3

What's in this issue

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The next Sibyls weekend - at Hilfield Franciscan Friary in Dorset

15 people are booked in for the 22nd to the 24th May at Hilfield . We have taken all the available full-board places, and have a further 5 members staying on self-catering terms. We have exclusive use of one of the houses, and use of the chapel for our own communion, as well as being able to take some part in the everyday Franciscan prayer routine. There are still three s/c places available. (cost £44 Fri – Sun) carol.nixon2012@btinternet.com

(It's possible we may be asked to hold a brief General Meeting to approve the new constitution etc., but that will be kept to the absolute minimum. That is not what the weekend is for. It is to allow personal and spiritual refreshment.)

SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

Meet on the Second Thursday of every second month for a Service at St Anne's Church, followed by a meal together

**Next Meeting - 9th April 2015 - 5:30 p.m.
at St Anne's Church, Dean Street, Soho.**

50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is)

THESE SERVICES ARE OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE, TO THEIR FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS

Come in whatever role is convenient at the time

If you would like your name, or the name of someone you know to be included on the prayer list, please email me (Susan Gilchrist) privately at sgen4144@gmail.com. (If you would like your request for prayers to be made available to the whole group, the Sibyls members can of course email the Sibyls email group instead)

These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, peaceful and healing, followed by a good meal in congenial surroundings.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, and from about 6.30 a gathering at a Soho restaurant.

We normally decide on the restaurant to go to at the end of the service.

You can just turn up on the evening: however it would also be helpful to get some idea of numbers in advance. If you know you are coming, please email sgen4144@gmail.com. If you are late please ring 07546 213 971.

2015 Conference of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups

Don't be put off by the length of the title!

This annual event is taking place in Merville from 23 - 25 May and Elaine Sommers would like to encourage anyone interested to join her, and swell the number of trans people attending.

There is a trans 'pre-conference' on 22nd to which Elaine is also going.

For further details, contact Elaine at elainesommers007@yahoo.co.uk

Fishing in Ireland

It was raining hard, and a big puddle had formed in front of an Irish pub. An old man stood beside the puddle holding a stick with a string on the end and jiggled it up and down in the water. A curious gentleman asked what he was doing.

'Fishing,' replied the old man.

'Poor old fool' thought the gentleman, so he invited the old man to have a drink in the pub.

Feeling he should start some conversation while they were sipping their whiskey, the gentleman asked, 'And how many have you caught?'

'You're the eighth.'



Edited Minutes of the Sibyls Birmingham Committee meeting 17 February 2015

12:30-16:00 LGBT Centre, 38-40 Holloway Circus, Birmingham

(Members preferred today's venue to the previous one.)

4 Present, 4 Apologies [Names redacted for privacy reasons. Sibyls members can obtain details of their committee direct from me.]

Matters arising from last meeting

Sibyls' business address. Jenny-Anne volunteered the Community House address, which is already the address for Trans-Forum & Unique. The Box Number subscription could now be cancelled.

Couples Weekend – the planning is in hands of E and S

Sparkle Fringe 8-15 July: main dates 10-12 July. Worship events: Sunday 12th July at 10am Sparkle in the Cathedral; 4.30pm Sparkle Sunday Service at the Metropolitan Church Manchester. The Revd Rachel Mann to be invited to lead an event during the Fringe which will include 40 talks and workshops

European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups – Jenny-Anne to follow up the invitation from the Revd Sharon Ferguson to assist her with a Trans pre-conference and a workshop during the main conference.

Treasurer's report

- The 2014 closing balance was £1,469.04
- Financial help is available for Sibyls who would be unable to attend a weekend because it was beyond their means.

Membership – has gone up to 71:

Website and Social Media.

Chris and Peter, two of the seven students from Manchester Metropolitan University working on the project, presented from 14:00- 15:15. Good progress being made

Constitution

It was agreed that a "Sibyls Together" meeting should be held at Hilfield at which the draft constitution could be presented (if considered appropriate by the committee) but its formal adoption would be expected to take place at a more representative meeting at a later date. [The editor publishes this item with a heavy heart.]

Events:

London Evening Meetings – numbers are small but the event is better publicised and details will be posted on the new website. The Rector of St Anne's, Soho, the Revd Simon Buckley, is very happy to continue hosting the evening prayer that forms the first part of these evenings, and would like to be an honorary member of Sibyls.

Hilfield- the 10 catering places have been filled; most self-catering places have been filled; only a few self-catering places available

St Andrew's Sisters – a Roman Catholic community based in Blackheath, south London. 2 members had visited last week and recommend the house as a possible venue for a quiet day event in the autumn. Simon Buckley has been suggested to lead it.

Birmingham Conference – a briefing paper had been circulated and planning was deferred to 2016.

Windermere Weekend is booked for May 2016

Couples Weekend. E has suggested possible facilitators and further planning remains with her.

Additional Events: Greenbelt Presence – hiring a stall would be expensive. It was suggested we approach LGCM about the possibility of sharing a stall with them

Outreach

- Involving Other Denominations. Manchester MCC is about to become a member of the URC, Chris Dowd has been training to become a URC minister.
- Should we be networked with other faiths – Imam, the Jewish trans network, etc?
- Networking is taking place with Soho Masses (RC)
- Quakers and Trans: two events are being organised by Y in Brighton in April and Manchester in November (31st). Jenny-Anne would be interested in being part of the Manchester event
- Speakers and Contributions at other Events – those who go out and speak will gain a reputation for that but Sibyls ought to hold a list of those who are willing to speak. A provisional list with suggestions was drawn up.
- Jenny-Anne would be speaking at a Conference on Prostate Cancer for gay and bi men and trans women in Manchester on 14th March.

Any other business

- Stonewall has just announced that it intends to include Trans in its brief and will be recruiting trans people as staff and volunteers
- GIRES has produced new e-learning on young trans people
- Scottish Equality Network have produced a publication on trans & homophobia

THE SIBYLS BOOK - ADVANCE NOTICE OF PUBLICATION

Fifteen years ago Sibyls members were not pleased with what the Evangelical Alliance had to say about trans people in its so-called report, *Transsexuality*, and then, just three years later, with the Church of England's fence sitting in Chapter 7 of *Some issues in human sexuality*. In fact we were quite annoyed that other religious people kept writing things about us while our own experience as transgender Christians was nowhere represented in this literature.

What we needed was a publication of our own. In it we would tell our stories, outline the latest scientific evidence, and set the theological record right as far as being transgender was concerned.

That's how the idea of the Sibyls Book was born. Sibyls began to send in their contributions and chapters were gathered from relevant specialists. Over the years further material has been added and the whole text worked up into a proposal which has been sent to various publishers, who have considered, and then rejected it (which is quite normal).

Now, though, we are pleased to announce that the Sibyls Book has been accepted for publication by internationally-respected religious publisher Darton, Longman and Todd. <http://www.darton-longman-todd.co.uk/>

The book's working title is *Trans Christian Voices* and it will be published in two formats: an e-book version and a paperback version. The recommended retail price of the paperback is expected to be £14.99 but it will be available to Sibyls members at a discounted price, plus postage and packing. We will be taking orders in due course, and are hoping that all members will buy at least one copy, as well as additional copies to pass on to their friends and church leadership.

The book has four sections:

- Transsexualism: Culture, Science and Society
- The Bible, Theology and Transsexualism
- Recollection and Testimony
- Working with Trans Identity and Spirituality

Jasmine Woolley's chapter is about the social construction of gender. Terry and Bernard Reed of GIRES bring us up to date with the latest scientific background. Chris Dowd dissects common misunderstandings of what it means to be trans.

Helen Savage writes about the value of ordinary, as distinct from academic, theology. Mercia McMahon contributes a chapter on Trans Liberating and Queer Theology. The Trans Awareness Group from a member's parish engages with Chapter 7 of *Some issues*.

Jay Walmsley describes the early days of Sibyls, the late Michelle Le Morvan the essence of her spirituality, and Sibyls tell their own stories of faith. Helen Belcher, on the other hand, ponders how transition can lead to loss of faith. Elaine Sommers 'Faith, Gender and Me' can be found between the book's covers as can Susan Gilchrist's 'Poems in Search of Self'.

Michelle O'Brien, one of the editors, explores intersex perspectives on medicine, diversity, identity and spirituality, while Tina Beardsley, who is the other editor, adds some history (including a brief biography of an older Sibyls member) and theology, and there is more about the Sibyls' workshop, Gender, Sexuality, and Spirituality.

We will be providing further information about the Sibyls' book, and how to purchase it, in due course.

Tina

SIBYLLINE SPIRITUALITY by SANDRA MOORE

Reading the 'Sibyls' newsletter, I am struck how much things have changed in the LGBT world. Nowadays we still read of members undergoing internal struggles with themselves and those near to them etc, but in western countries at least, the overall context is quite different from years ago. 'Transgender' is now a recognized way of being, rather than, as was the case years ago, a sort of mental illness or 'fault in the machinery'. We are almost at the place where general up-to-speed opinion considers 'sex-change' to be a sort of lifestyle option. In other words, a not particularly significant matter, in social terms, though obviously not for the individual concerned! Does that mean though, that there is a good understanding about what transgender means, or just that the world has not much interest and the whole thing can be relegated to an unimportant side-line?

30 years ago, one could still meet transgender people terribly upset by the fact that the Bible contains the famous verses forbidding the wearing of clothes of the opposite gender. They were in some cases quite 'religious' people who felt they stumbled badly over these verses and agonised about how to be religious *and* Trans'. This is hardly a good description of today's situation! Who, outside small ecclesiastical circles, cares what the Bible says about behaviour? In former times, codes derived from the churches still were represented in the ruling establishments, maybe quite hypocritically, but sufficiently to control public opinion, to the extent that anyone openly gay or trans could expect a very bad time, more or less condoned by opinion shapers in the media or elsewhere. Religion in fact was more or less a bulwark of conservative traditional morality and that was seen by many as its main purpose, to hold the line against atheistical scientists and their permissiveness. But today, 'Scientific Enlightenment' has become the 'religious' orthodoxy! Woe betide those who cast doubt on it!

The present 'Sibyls' situation is therefore a bit different, I think, from that of years ago. It seems there are still many transgender people who do feel the need of some form of religious life. The question is, isn't it, "What is transgender people's feeling for a *religious attitude* all about?"

In my mind it's like this - A religion, or religious attitude, is not primarily to do with what one *thinks* or understands to be "true", but far more about the way one feels it necessary to BE or to DO in order to express one's nature as a spirit on earth. A religion active within someone is far less a question of a set of ideas or practices than a question of true *belief*, using the word "Belief" as "BE LIVE", i.e. to mean what one actually DOES in life.

It seems to me that all transgender people, (and in the last resort I maintain that everyone is to some extent "Trans"), are those whose "religious nature" drives them to act differently from the way the general established order of things in the world and society demands or suggests. It creates a contradiction. Trans people are contradicting society in their wills. We are contradicting the social forms we have been conditioned with and inherited. The contradiction emerges first in the power of the desire before understandings can accommodate it. This is because the general internalised understandings we are educated with do not comprehend this factor of transformative desire.

The world's culture, science and habit give us all a set of moral and seemingly factual information and precepts based on its current view of the nature of reality. But it does not have an eye for or take account of anything that seems to contradict absolutely its so called 'Facts', (which are any case are largely a mythology.) In varying degrees 'Trans' people, whether they "dress up" occasionally, or always, only think about living as the opposite gender, or actually do so, always are in fact acting "RELIGIOUSLY" in the true sense of the word; i.e. they are following the promptings of their inner self - the self that is NOT conditioned by outwardly all powerful habit, convention, social demands, and "science".

I expect there are many who will struggle with this conclusion. They will feel that in becoming someone of the opposite gender whether for a few seconds, hours, or even years, they must still conform to various habitual ideas about what 'MAN', 'WOMAN', 'RELIGION' mean. Most of all they will struggle with the completely materialistic and banal ideas shoved around in popular science articles about male and female as part of our animal evolutionary inheritance and therefore immutable in some way. This so called scientific view is in fact the old antiquated religion of an earlier time living on like a mummified relic, much like the old temples in Ancient Rome or Egypt.

It is worth noting however that Christians in earlier times often had the same dilemma. They felt something emanating from within them which drove them to contradict and refuse tribute to the ideas forms and practices of the pagan world around them. They felt their whole life would be a lie or half-truth at best if they did not declare their inner reality as Christian. In effect they felt with Paul that Christ's coming had REVERSED the nature of reality so that the impetus for evolution now lived within human beings (as their Christening blessing so to speak) and no longer outside them in the form of a State, Government, Emperor or even established religion. In effect they refused tribute by declaring themselves Christian and thereby put their life on the line.

Well in that sense it seems to me Trans life is ipso facto religious. It does not need any external accretions. Through it one has to be attentive (in the same way that maybe Socrates or Paul, Joan of Arc or Martin Luther-King were) to the promptings of one's awakening inner self and to allow it to act in one's life as guide, messenger and innermost flowering. Surely that is what a religious life is ???

Bishop Libby Lane



Libby Lane was consecrated as the 8th Bishop of Stockport at a ceremony at York Minster on Monday 26 January 2015. As Bishop of Stockport she will serve as a suffragan (assistant) bishop in the Diocese of Chester.

She was ordained as a priest in 1994 and has served a number of parish and chaplaincy roles in the North of England in the Dioceses of Blackburn, York and Chester. For the past 8 years she has served as Vicar of St. Peter's Hale and St. Elizabeth's Ashley. She is one of eight clergy women from the Church of England elected as Participant Observers in the House of Bishops, as the representative from the dioceses of the North West.

As a suffragan bishop, she will not be in line to enter the Lords. But it is thought that the first female *diocesan* bishop could be chosen in the New Year. The Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham said recently that female candidates had been considered for its vacancy.

Speaking at Stockport town hall when she was announced as **the new Bishop of Stockport, Libby Lane said:** "I am grateful for, though somewhat daunted by, the confidence placed in me by the Diocese of Chester. This is unexpected and very exciting. On this historic day as the Church of England announces the first woman nominated to be Bishop, I am very conscious of all those who have gone before me, women and men, who for decades have looked forward to this moment. But most of all I am thankful to God.

"The church faces wonderful opportunities, to proclaim afresh, in this generation, the Good News of Jesus and to build His Kingdom. The Church of England is called to serve all the people of this country, and being present in every community, we communicate our faith best when our lives build up the lives of others, especially the most vulnerable. I am excited by the possibilities and challenges ahead."

What the other prelates said:

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Justin Welby, said: "I am absolutely delighted that Libby has been appointed to succeed Bishop Robert Atwell as Bishop of Stockport. Her Christ-centred life, calmness and clear determination to serve the church and the community make her a wonderful choice. She will be bishop in a diocese that has been outstanding in its development of people, and she will make a major contribution. She and her family will be in my prayers during the initial excitement, and the pressures of moving".

The Archbishop of York, the Most Revd Dr John Sentamu, said on day of the announcement: "It is with great joy that on January 26, 2015 - the feast of Timothy and Titus, companions of Paul - I will be in York Minster, presiding over the consecration of the Revd Libby Lane as Bishop Suffragan of Stockport. Libby brings a wealth of experience in parish ministry, in hospital and FE chaplaincy, in vocations work and the nurture of ordinands. I am delighted that she will exercise her episcopal ministry with joy, prayerfulness, and trust in God.

"When the General Synod rejected the previous proposals in November 2012, **Archbishop Desmond Tutu,** wrote to 'pour some balm on my wounded heart'. That year, he encouraged me, his province was finally celebrating the election of two women bishops. 'Be comforted', he said, 'it will come.'

"When I wrote to him last weekend to offer my prayers for his battle with prostate cancer, he replied with these words: 'Wonderful that you over there will soon have women bishops. **Yippee!** I know you have pushed for this for a long time. **Yippee again!**'

The Bishop of Chester, the Rt Revd Dr Peter Forster, said: "Libby has had a varied and distinguished ministry, and is currently a first-rate parish priest. She has already demonstrated her ability to contribute nationally through her representative role in the House of Bishops, on behalf of the north-west England dioceses. As the first woman bishop in the Church of England she will face many challenges as well as enjoying many opportunities to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ. I have no doubt that she has the gifts and determination to be an outstanding bishop. I am delighted at her designation as Bishop of Stockport after a lengthy process of discernment across the Church of England and beyond."



At the consecration at York



With daughter Connie



Two Pioneering Women *By Elaine Sommers, Co-Chair of Accepting Evangelicals*

On January 26 the Revd Libby Lane hit the headlines when she was consecrated as the Bishop of Stockport, and the first woman bishop in the Church of England. There was much rejoicing as the Archbishop of York presided over this milestone event in the inclusion of women, albeit with a brief interruption from a protestor. It was a great day for all who support full equality in church leadership.

A somewhat less publicised event, which took place on the same day, was the funeral of the Revd Carol Stone, who died in December after a short illness. She was the vicar of Upper Stratton, near Swindon, in the diocese of Bristol, a post which she had held since 1996.



Bishop Mike Hill [of Bristol] published a beautiful tribute to her on his diocesan website, describing her as *‘a diligent, thoughtful and compassionate parish priest. She was both loved and valued by her ordained colleagues, but equally was loved by the people she served within and beyond the Church. She was in many senses an old fashioned parish priest who loved the Church of England, its worship and its people. It could truly be said that her ministry spanned all age groups.’*

What he didn't mention (possibly in honour of Carol's wishes) was that she had started her ministry as a man, and subsequently transitioned to being Carol. According to a recent Church of England Newspaper report, she was the first transgender parish priest in the Church of England to do so. Although we never met, we had corresponded a little and I had come to appreciate what a remarkable individual she was. The fact that she confided with her congregation about her trans nature, and that they in return supported her through and beyond her transition, says a lot about her courage, but also about the degree of love and acceptance shown by her parishioners, something which many of us would envy.

Other trans clergy have followed in Carol's footsteps, and I don't expect Libby will be the only woman bishop for long. But being the first in anything is special. So let us celebrate two pioneering women, on very different journeys, one ending, another beginning – separate paths, now drawn together by the same day. May their lives be an example to us all, and for those who experience discrimination in the Church just because they are different, a source of encouragement and hope. Libby and Carol, we salute you!

From 'The Swindon Advertiser'

“The Rev Carol Stone, who served as vicar of St Philip’s Church, in Upper Stratton and St Peter’s Church, in Penhill, died on Saturday, December 27 2014 in Prospect Hospice after a short fight with pancreatic cancer.

She was the first Church of England priest to undergo a sex change and return to the pulpit. The Bishop of Swindon, Dr Lee Rayfield, paid tribute to the Rev Carol Stone.

“First of all, Carol faced her diagnosis of pancreatic cancer really courageously. It was very sudden. She acted very courageously and made a wise decision based around her quality of life, rather than quantity. She knew it was going to be terminal and made a conscious decision to not try and extend her life by chemotherapy and other treatments which were going to make it hard for her. That was a wise decision and a courageous one.”

Dr Rayfield said he had first come across the Rev Stone when she decided to undergo gender reassignment surgery in 2000. She was ordained as Peter Stone in 1978 and served in Bradford-on-Avon, as well as taking a role as chaplain at Dauntsey’s School in West Lavington. In 1996, she took up her post in Upper Stratton, before making the decision to change sex.

“That divided opinion, but she got through it with the remarkable support from her congregation. The church authorities decided it was right to support her. It wasn’t an easy journey for her and her courage in choosing what she wanted earned people’s respect. It was that she was determined with what she felt was the right thing and that helped her tremendously. She had a lot of warmth, love and support from the congregation at St Philip’s, which was part of how she managed to overcome the adversity. She was an amazingly hardworking person and probably she perhaps worked too hard, as many clergy do.

“One particular thing I remember was a relentless series of vandalism at the church (St Philip’s) and it was incredible how she and her colleagues came through that because it would have sent anybody else into deep depression. It was hard, but she had tremendous determination and she wasn’t somebody who easily gave up. She always found more reserves of energy and hope. That was really impressive. I remember Carol as somebody who wasn’t afraid to speak her mind. She told you what she thought and bishops weren’t immune from that. I’m going to miss her and I know many other people will. It’s very sad this happened to her, but she faced it with courage and with faith.”

CAROL STONE – An Appreciation

Jay

It was with great sadness that I heard of the death of Carol Stone. She was the first, and for that will always be remembered.

There is no way that I can write an obituary. I met her only the once and that was when she was recovering from her operation in Leicester and not at her best. However she was very likeable and over the years we exchanged letters, phone calls, Christmas cards etc. Although she was never one of the more involved Sibyls, she always valued the sense of companionship and support of the Sibyls.

What was exciting was that Carol was the first Anglican priest to change gender and be accepted by her superiors and her congregation. I well remember the great excitement when the news broke, the press were full of it, with the huge sense of joy that someone had finally broken through and been accepted. And where one could do it, more would surely follow And of course they did. It felt like a new dawn.

It was of course very stressful for Carol. She had to cope with all the furore and curiosity, which must have been very trying. What enabled her to succeed was the love and support of her congregation who wanted her to continue as their priest. Happily the then Bishop of Bristol saw the strength of that feeling and gave his support. The rest is as they say history.

It may be said that she was fortunate in her congregation and bishop, and that is true. However, her congregation loved and supported her because of the love and support that Carol had given them. They recognised that and valued her; they wanted her. That mutual love underpinned her success and made it all possible.

Rest in peace, Carol. You will not be forgotten.

Was Libby Lane the *first* female bishop in the Church of England?? Well, not quite...

She was pre-empted by 11-year-old Rebecca Howarth, whose appointment was announced on December 4th.!



Some years ago Oldham Parish Church revived a medieval tradition that over the Advent/Christmas season the serving Bishop of Manchester symbolically steps down from his duties at the church and a young church member takes over the responsibilities instead throughout the festive season. This is symbolic of Jesus's concern for children - and a graphic demonstration of the mighty being torn down and the humble and meek raised up. "We decided that the best candidate was a girl this year, so we anticipated the new Bishop of Stockport by having a girl bishop rather than boy bishop as a symbol of our commitment to equality."



Rebecca's official investiture at a special service by Bishop David Walker:

Bishop David asked, "Will you be faithful to the promises made at your Baptism and affirmed at your Confirmation? Will you pray for the people of this Parish and for those in need?"

"I will, the Lord being my helper. " Then Bishop Rebecca took her place before being presented to the people



This attracted much media interest, where Bishop Rebecca showed herself up to the job:

For further information please visit

<http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/meet-uks-first-female-bishop-8222430>



It is also salutary to remember that the Episcopalian Church in the U.S.A. has been led *since 2006* by Presiding **Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori**, here seen in Haiti surrounded by clergy, all black, all men, who spoke of their pleasure that she had visited them after years where they had known of her only through praying for her.

There has however been much controversy over her liberal leadership, with more conservative U.S. parishes breaking away. See:

<http://www.religionnews.com/2014/09/23/episcopal-church-katharine-jefferts-schori-will-seek-re-election/>

Almost a mirror image — The Archbishop of Canterbury, the **Most Revd Justin Welby**, on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral, surrounded by female clergy. It gives an idea how far the C of E has travelled in the last decades. Will the C of E hold together better in U.K. than in the U.S.A.?



Transgender News from around the world—let's start with the positive

Increase in referrals for young trans people due to 'wider acceptance' 5th February 2015

There has been a steady rise in the number of young people being referred to support services for help with transgender issues, figures from a London NHS trust show. The Tavistock and Portman Clinic said 441 young people came to them for assessment in 2013/14, an increase of 350 from the period of 2009/2010. From 2013 to last year, 440 referrals came from within England. Nineteen people from Wales attended the clinic, two from Northern Ireland and two from Scotland. Northern Ireland and Scotland also have their own separate services, although very young children will be referred to specialists in London. Christina Richards, a senior specialist and psychotherapist at the Nottingham Gender Identity Clinic told *BBC Newsbeat*: "I think the increase in referrals is largely due to wider acceptance and wider understanding. "Some of the silly ideas about what 'trans' means have disappeared now. (N.B. **Waiting times for appointments are growing.**)

Trans children's sense of gender is indistinguishable from cis children 4th February 2015

A US study has found that trans children's sense of their gender is as firmly held as other children's. *Gender Cognition in Transgender Children* studied trans children who live as their acquired gender in supportive homes and compared with cisgender children of the same age. Study author Kristina Olson said she was inspired by the transgender child of a friend, and the challenges the family experienced. She said in a statement at the Association of Psychological Science: "Seeing how little scientific information there was, basically nothing for parents, was hard to watch. Doctors were saying, 'We just don't know,' so the parents have to make these really big decisions: Should I let my kid go to school as a girl, or should I make my kid go to school as a boy? Should my child be in therapy to try to change what she says she is, or should she be supported?" The study found trans children's responses were indistinguishable from cis children, they were not confused or pretending, and they deeply felt and understood their gender identities. Co-author Dr Nicholas Eaton said: "We found that gender cognition in the transgender kids was indistinguishable from their non-transgender peers and siblings. They appear exactly like their non-transgender peers/siblings, but in the direction of their gender identity, not their sex. For example, in the case of a child who was assigned male sex at birth but now lives life fully as a girl, her responses on all the study's tasks were indistinguishable from non-transgender girls.

Israel to permit trans people to legally change gender without surgery 19th January 2015

Israel is to re-draft its recognition laws, so trans people will no longer be forced to undergo surgery to legally change their gender. Israel's Interior Ministry announced it would allow citizens to change their gender designation on ID cards from now on – without requiring them to go through gender reassignment surgery first. Last year, the Danish parliament voted to scrap a law that required people to undergo gender reassignment surgery and sterilisation before they were eligible to be recognised as their preferred gender. The requirement was also abolished at the federal level in the United States last year.

Thailand's new constitution will include references to a third gender for the first time.

A spokesman for the panel which is drafting the new constitution, Kamnoon Sittisamarn, said this was to ensure all sexual identities would be protected and treated equally under the law. He told Reuters: "We are putting the words 'third gender' in the constitution because Thai society has advanced. There are not only men and women, we need to protect all sexes. We consider all sexes to be equal."

Naples Federico II University to give trans students option of 'aliases' to protect privacy 17th Feb 2015

British Army officer: I was 'living an act' before coming out as trans 19th January 2015

An officer in the British Army has opened up about being transgender. Hannah Winterbourne, who serves as a captain of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers – is the highest-ranking openly transgender person in the British Armed Forces. The 27-year-old decided to transition to female while Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. She told *All About Trans*: "I was selected for the Army at the age of 15. "I came out as a trans soldier about a year and a half ago... and since then I've become the highest ranking openly serving trans soldier. I think initially it was a bit of a shock to some people, because it's not something you come across every day in the Army... however, people soon realise that it didn't make a difference to my job." However, she told *The Sun* that she struggled to cope while serving in Afghanistan, prior to coming out. She said: "In Afghanistan I was living an act. I was acting for everyone around me. There was no let up where I could not stop that act. "In my part of the tent there were seven guys living on top of each other. Previously I'd relished my own time where I could be honest with myself."

US military finally gives go-ahead for Chelsea Manning gender transition 13th February 2015

The US military has finally approved Chelsea Manning (sentenced for leaking documents) for access to hormone therapy, according to reports. On Feb 5th a memo from Colonel Erica Nelson (Fort Leavenworth military prison) said: "After carefully considering the recommendation that (hormone treatment) is medically appropriate and necessary, and weighing all associated safety and security risks presented, I approve adding (hormone treatment) to Inmate Manning's treatment plan." **Transgender people are still barred from serving in the US military – under a code that still classifies transgender people as mentally ill. Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel previously said the ban should "continue to be reviewed", and that he was "open" to the idea of allowing trans people to serve, but Mr Hagel recently stepped down from his role, to be replaced by Ashton B Carter – who is yet to comment on the ongoing ban.**

The BBC has revealed details about a new transgender-focussed sitcom, *Boy Meets Girl*. 2nd February 2015

The six-part sitcom, which will air on BBC2 later this year, stars Harry Hepple and trans actress Rebecca Root. The show – which has been likened to *Gavin and Stacey* revolves around the developing relationship between the pair's characters Leo, 26, and Judy, 40. BBC Commissioning Editor Kristian Smith said: "Boy Meets Girl is a heart-warming romantic comedy that draws on the glorious differences that shape all of us. It's a brilliant thing to be able to support comedy that is not only funny, but can also promote affirming messages of humanity and acceptance." The show is the first major role for Root, who usually works as a specialist voice coach helping trans people with their speaking voice. A broadcast date is yet to be confirmed.



Geena Rocero tells the world she was born a boy

https://www.ted.com/talks/geena_rocero_why_i_must_come_out

<http://nymag.com/thecut/2014/04/transgender-model-geena-rocero-on-her-ted-talk.html>

Miss Rocero was born in the Philippines and moved to the U.S. when she was 17, where she underwent sexual re-assignment surgery. She became a New York model when she was 21, and told almost no-one about her birth gender. But after realising that she wanted to help the trans community, she came out in a talk at the TED conference on March 31st 2014 Miss Rocero's TED talk earned her a standing ovation, over two million online views, and widespread positive attention.

Miss Rocero was born to a working-class family in the Manila region of the Philippines, and never once felt either like a boy or a 'gay' boy. Fortunately - unlike so many others, she points out - she not only had the unwavering support of both parents from a young age, but she lived in a part of the world where the transgender community thrives. Still, Miss Rocero went to a Catholic school and was required to wear a boys uniform - which she altered to at least fit her in a more feminine way - and was still teased and insulted on occasion. At the age of 15, Miss Rocero was encouraged to compete in a prestigious transgender pageant, and came second. She went on to win many more, and used her earnings to buy hormones that helped her grow breasts and adopt more womanly attributes; in spite of her fears for the drugs' safety. She was 17 when she moved to the U.S. to join her mother in San Francisco. To her enormous delight, the move meant she could change her name and identify as a 'female' on immigration records. Receiving her female driver's license was a moment she will never forget. 'Getting that licence, to me, was a licence to live.'

After the TED talk, Miss Rocero co-founded **Gender Proud**; a global awareness campaign that fights for transgender rights. According to her, 89per cent of people in the U.S. currently believe that transgender people deserve the same rights and legal protections as others. Despite this encouraging statistic, Miss Rocero feels there is 'still a long way to go' - something that parents of transgender children especially need to recognize. 'Having the space to self-identify with a gender we weren't born with is a conversation we should have with parents, with colleagues, with friends. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done. Parents need to approach a child with curiosity and openness.'



Elle Fanning has been cast as a transgender teenage boy in a new film. 3rd November 2014 The 16-year-old actress – sister to Dakota Fanning – has been cast alongside Susan Sarandon and Naomi Watts in indie drama **Three Generations**, which will follow Fanning's character Ray as he transitions to male. There has been criticism that the film is not using a trans actor.

A transgender parliamentary candidate for the Green party has spoken about the challenges of running for office. 13th December 2014

Labour PPC Emily Brothers – who is standing for Parliament in Sutton and Cheam – made history within the Labour party this week when she opened up about being transgender. However, she will not be the only openly trans candidate in 2015 – with a number standing for minor parties. Campaigner Charlie Kiss, 49, is one of two trans candidates selected by the Green Party, and is standing in Islington South and Finsbury. A second trans Green candidate, Stella Gardiner, is standing in Bexleyheath and Crayford. Mr Kiss – who transitioned to male over a decade ago – will have an uphill climb, as the Greens received just 710 votes in the constituency in 2010, losing the party's deposit. "It seems that I am another first for the Green Party, which is to be the first trans man to stand for the UK parliament. When I ran in local elections I thought it was better to be upfront about it, so I explained that I had transitioned from female to male on all the election leaflets that were delivered. LGBT struggles are close to my heart and I will always support equality for all."

Obama changes LGBT awareness by saying just three words 21st January 2015

President Barack Obama has marked the end of an exceptional 12 months for global LGBT awareness by becoming the first president to explicitly use the term in the State of the Union address. Towards the end of his speech last night, while discussing human rights, Mr Obama said: "That's why we defend free speech, and advocate for political prisoners, and condemn the persecution of women, or religious minorities, or people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. We do these things not only because they are the right things to do, but because ultimately they will make us safer."

NHS England: Trans people shouldn't wait longer than 18 weeks for treatment - in theory 20th Feb 2015

Stonewall announces it will now campaign for trans rights too 16th February 2015

BUT NOT ALL IS POSITIVE

Russia has listed transsexual and transgender people among those who will no longer qualify for driving licences. 10th Jan 2015

The Russian Government characterised people who change their gender as having a "disorder" and styled the ban as part of a crackdown on people with mental health issues. The editor heard this item on the 'Today' programme, when Jim Naughtie introduced it as 'a nice little bizarre item' This annoyed me, so I trawled the internet for the facts – I have 36 pages if anyone wants to know more, but the gist is that in a context of appalling road accident rates, LGBT people are receiving the usual hostile treatment from the Russian Government.

Transgender women have been banned from participating in the National Women's Football Championship in Vietnam. 30th January 2015

The announcement of the ban was made by the Vietnam Football Federation this week. Duong Nghiep Khoi, vice secretary of the federation on Thursday said: "The national championship is exclusively for women, so transsexuals will not be allowed. This regulation is to ensure fair competition and for the development of Vietnam women's football".

Serbian officer forced to retire after coming out as transgender 15th January 2015

An activist group in Serbia has submitted a complaint after it says a transgender veteran officer in the country's military was forcibly retired after coming out as transgender. According to activist group Egal's complaint, the officer, identified only as Helena, was forced to retire after a "psychiatric diagnosis" deemed that her being trans could "threaten the reputation" of the army. [The complaint was submitted to the Serbian commissioner for the protection of equality on Wednesday.](#) According to the statement from Egal, Helena said: "Though the military hospital told me I am fit for military service, someone in the defence ministry claims I threaten the reputation of the army." Helena, who spent almost half of her life serving in the army, began to transition recently. [The commission acts independently as a watchdog, and is appointed by Parliament. Serbia, a country hoping to join the EU, is under pressure to legislate to protect minorities.](#)

4 interacting factors in UK - ignorance; violence; some types of principled fundamentalism; trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFS)

A trans woman has alleged she was sacked because she refused to stop using the women's toilets.

23rd January 2015

Keira James, 31, had worked for insurance company Aviva in Sheffield since June 2014, through a third-party recruitment agency. However, she was told not to return earlier this month, after a dispute over toilets. Ms James told the *Sheffield Star*: "I no longer felt comfortable using the men's toilets so plucked up the courage to use the female toilets. A few weeks later I was told by a manager that some staff had said they did not feel I had a right to use the female toilets. Then a week later I was told by the recruitment agency that I was not to return to the role. I'm certain there is a link between the two and I'm now without a job. I've never had a problem at work before – it was horrible, really embarrassing and brought back a lot of gender anxiety that I'd experienced for years." The Sheffield Industrial Workers of the World Union held a protest on Wednesday outside the Aviva HQ, to draw attention to the decision. A spokesperson for Aviva said: "[We're proud of being an inclusive employer and have a very clear policy on managing gender identity in the workplace. Although we're still investigating the matter, sadly it seems on this occasion, that policy may not have been followed and we are very sorry if this is the case. We have made it clear to our supplier that the individual concerned is very welcome at Aviva. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with the individual concerned, together with a representative of the supplier, to apologise for any misunderstanding. Aviva is very supportive of the trans community, we have an active Aviva Pride LGBT employee network and we're passionate about enabling people to be themselves at work.](#)"

Man jailed for transphobic attack in Liverpool *LIVERPOOL ECHO* 14th Jan 2015

20-year-old Ryan Kenny from Wirral has been jailed for 20 months for attacking a trans woman in Liverpool on the day she was 'out' for the first time. The 25-year-old was punched twice in the face and had her wig ripped off just after leaving a support group meeting in the city. Her make-up bag was then stolen. Det Insp Phil Mahon, from Merseyside Police's Sigma hate crime unit, praised the victim for her bravery in coming forward. The victim today encouraged other hate crime victims to step forward. [In-trust Merseyside, a group that tackles transphobia, has invited Ryan Kenny to attend an education session to learn about the issues faced by trans people.](#)

Green Party candidate accused of transphobia 22nd January 2015

Cambridge Green Park parliamentary candidate **Rupert Read** has tweeted about the use of the word "cisgender" as the opposite of "transgender" saying it "troubled" him. In a blog post he referred to trans women as "a sort of 'opt-in' version of what it is to be a woman". There is a genuine, complicated question within Feminism about whether trans-women can or should in every or all respects be regarded straightforwardly as women (They don't have periods, they don't experience menopause; they chose to be (to become) women rather than having been brought up gendered female; etc. etc). It is complicated. Does feeling psychologically as if you are a woman and making certain changes to your body as a consequence make you a woman? Is it enough, in order to BE a woman, to psychically identify as one? To this second question, we must surely answer: no. Do the mass of women who did not go through the process of sex-reassignment — ordinary women, so-called 'cissexuals' — have no right to point out some differences between themselves and trans-women?"

Sarah Brown, former Cambridge councillor and trans activist, told Cambridge News: "Rupert seems to be endorsing a fringe form of feminism that portrays transgender women as dangerous sex pests and predators. In reality, transgender women face prejudice and violence at rates far higher than other women, and desperately need protection."

[The Green Party leadership issued a joint statement on 27th Jan.](#) "As leaders of the Green Party we wish to state our disappointment with the comments made by Rupert Read and express our sympathies with anyone who was hurt or offended by his remarks. We are pleased that Rupert Read has issued a full apology and hope that his meetings with LGBTIQ groups will help to repair some of the upset that has been caused. The Green Party is wholly committed to fighting for equality and fair representation for all transgender and LGBTIQ communities and we wish to reiterate and reaffirm our party's commitment to that cause. We now want to do all we can to move forward positively and continue the important job of standing up for LGBTIQ rights".

[A statement from the Green Party Women's Group added:](#) "We reiterate the sentiment of the Green Party's leaders in response to these comments from Cambridge parliamentary candidate; Rupert Read. We were deeply concerned that Rupert Read's comments could promote misunderstanding of trans issues, and of modern feminism. Green Party Women considers feminism which excludes trans people to be an extremist fringe, with no place in the Green party, or the wider feminist movement. The feminist movement cannot succeed without paying attention to all aspects of inequality. We welcome all women with open arms, and defer to trans women in issues of particular relevance to them. We hope this incident serves as a reminder for all our future candidates of the importance of being informed about issues of oppression. We will continue to work to ensure the party fights for inclusive feminism, and that all our candidates and members are briefed on the issues of all women."

Germaine Greer: I don't believe in transphobia 28th January 2015

Germaine Greer has claimed that transgender women aren't women. The feminist figure has previously sparked outcry over her views on trans women, claiming "they seem to us ghastly parodies" – and claimed being trans was a "delusion". **She faced protests this week when she spoke at the Cambridge University Students' Union**, with members of the LGBT+ society encouraging a boycott of the event. When asked about her previous comments, she said: "I didn't know there was such a thing as transphobia. Arachnophobia, yes. Transphobia, no." She also suggested that trans women do not know what it is like "to have a big, hairy, smelly vagina".

Bethany Black, who starred in a recent episode of LGBT drama *Banana*, told *The Independent* (reported on the 13th Feb) "Well, I do [have a smelly vagina]. (Bethany came out as trans 15 years ago.) "Transgender bodies are obsessed over in a way that cisgender ones aren't. People who like what Germaine Greer has been saying are very much a product of the past and it's becoming less and less relevant today."

There was, and still is, considerable violent internet controversy after this event, especially after **Peter Tatchell** was amongst the signatories of a letter to the Guardian, which criticised the 'silencing' of free speech where trans issues were concerned. The Read case (p.9) and Greer case were cited as evidence: "You do not have to agree with the views that are being silenced to find these tactics illiberal and undemocratic.....We call on universities and other organisations to stand up to attempts at intimidation and affirm their support for the basic principles of democratic political exchange."

Mr Tatchell says he signed the letter on free speech grounds, and insists he supports trans rights. "A colleague estimates that I received well over 2,000 attacks in the first 24 hours after The Guardian letter was published; nearly all of them misrepresenting the letter and my record of solidarity with the trans community. Many of the responses are abusive. Some are threatening. I have a 40 year record of supporting trans people and rights, starting in the early 1970s when many people did not. I am now told that my support for the trans community is not wanted. These critics claim to represent the trans community but I doubt they do. They say my signature on the Guardian letter is collusion with ideas that lead to the hatred and murder of trans people. But the letter did not attack trans people or trans rights. It defended free speech and opposed witch-hunts. I strongly disagree with feminists who denigrate trans people and have said so publicly many times. But I think the best way to respond to anti-trans views is to debate and expose them. That's why I oppose no-platforming, bans and censorship – except if a person resorts to threats, harassment or violence.

A poster has been put up at University of Bristol misgendering trans women and claiming cis women need to "surrender their boundaries". 20th January 2015

The poster appears to be a parody of one put up by Bristol's LGBT society which went viral in November. The original poster read "If you're out in public and you can't figure out a stranger's gender, follow these simple steps: 1. Don't worry about it." Bristol LGBT society widespread praise for its trans-positive campaign.

The new posters claim to be giving advice for women if "a man tries to enter a women's bathroom". They refer to trans women as "transgender males" and claim they rape women "every nine minutes". Its advice is "kindly surrender your boundaries" and "don't worry about it, men know better than you." It claims to be from the "MENZ+ Society" which does not exist, but appears to be mocking the trans-positive stance of Bristol's LGBT+ Society. **The style is similar to language used by anti-trans feminists, often referred to as TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists).**

Bristol University Feminist Society condemned the posters. President Hattie Stamp told *Epigram*, Bristol's student newspaper: "I think it's a really hateful thing to do, its intention is to make trans people feel unsafe at Uni by calling them transgender males (when they self-identify as a woman) and completely dismisses their experiences and incites discrimination."

Equality, Liberation and Access Officer Alice Phillips said: "I'm extremely disturbed by the appearance of this poster in the Wills Memorial building. "There is absolutely no place for transphobia at the University of Bristol and as a Union we're going to be doing everything we can to find out where this has come from. "Security services are going to be extra vigilant on their patrols and are going to be taking down any posters they see."

No one has claimed responsibility for the poster.

Policeman played 'Dude Looks Like a Lady' while questioning trans woman 6th February 2015

A police detective has been given a warning for playing the song 'Dude Looks Like a Lady' while interrogating a homeless transgender woman. Ohio woman Robin Adelman says that officers openly mocked her for her gender during questioning. "I live in a homeless shelter, but things have been going well for me. I'm really loving the fact that I decided to transition and I wouldn't have had it any other way. But some of this is really difficult. I hear that kind of stuff on the street every single day, no matter what. So when I heard it from a professional police officer who is supposed to protect us, it was just too much. Every transgender person wants to be left alone. We want to blend back into society and be who we are. We don't even want you to notice us." **The officer has been ordered to undergo sensitivity training.**

A Republican State Senator for Kentucky has proposed a bill that would offer students money if they report trans students found in appropriate bathrooms for their gender. 20th January 2015

Senator C.B Embry's proposed bill will ban trans students from using and toilet or changing room "designated for use by students of the opposite biological sex while students of the opposite biological sex are present or could be present".

It is similar to other bills being proposed around the US which limit trans students rights, but uniquely Sen Embry's bill will force schools to comply by offering a reward of \$2,500 (£1,650) to any student who reports a trans student violating the law. The money would be paid directly by the school and is intended as compensation for "for all psychological, emotional, and physical harm suffered".

He believes trans people using appropriate bathrooms "will create a significant potential for disruption of school activities and unsafe conditions" and "will create potential embarrassment, shame, and psychological injury to students."

Sen Embry said: "[Trans people are] certainly welcome to live their lives as they choose, if they want to dress as the opposite sex and the school is OK with that, that's fine. I am very much in favor of strong anti-bullying laws that protect students no matter what the reason for bullying may be — fat or short, don't speak plain, sexual orientation, whatever.

I have a friend, and we can all say these things, who is a homosexual and she agrees that she doesn't want men in her bathroom."

Without wanting to get embroiled in the U.S. debate, I draw the next page to your attention. [Editor]



The first picture has been released of Oscar-winner Eddie Redmayne as trans woman Lili Ebe.

5th March 2015

Redmayne is to play Lili Ebe, one of the first people to undergo sex reassignment surgery, in 'The Danish Girl', which will be released on 27 November. . It is based on a novel by David Ebershoff and tells the story of Ebe, an artist who transitioned in the 1930s and died aged 48, after a failed uterus transplant.



General Medical Council drops case against Richard Curtis

27th February 2015

The GMC had opened an investigation into Dr Richard Curtis in 2013, after the London-based gender specialist was accused of providing inappropriate treatment at his clinic. Complaints were made that Dr Curtis had too readily prescribed treatments – with allegations he had failed to treat patients in accordance with standard procedures for trans people, and had been “misleading” in two endorsements for gender reassignment surgery. Today, the GMC confirmed that the ‘Fitness to Practice’ hearing originally scheduled for this month will not be going forward.

A statement from Dr Curtis said: “It is with much relief that I announce the conclusion of the GMC investigation which has now been in process for nearly four years. In short the GMC have entirely dismissed the case. There was no Fitness to Practice hearing and no sanctions. The conditions which were imposed over three years ago, as it turns out, inappropriately, will be removed when the process for that to occur is administered by the GMC and should be a formality. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for all those who have given their support during this very difficult time.”

Facebook introduces ‘infinite’ gender options

27th February 2015

Last February, Facebook introduced custom gender options, no longer forcing users to choose between just ‘male’ and ‘female’ – and allowing them to select from a list of over 50 pre-selected genders – including androgynous, bigender, intersex, genderfluid and transsexual. This week, the site has rolled out a change to US users – allowing people free range to pick their own gender identity, without having to choose from a pre-selected list.

A statement from Facebook Diversity said: “Last year we were proud to add a custom gender option to help people better express their identities on Facebook. We collaborated with our Network of Support, a group of leading LGBT advocacy organizations, to offer an extensive list of gender identities that many people use to describe themselves. After a year of offering this feature, we have expanded it to include a free-form field. Now, if you do not identify with the pre-populated list of gender identities, you are able to add your own. As before, you can add up to ten gender terms and also have the ability to control the audience with whom you would like to share your custom gender. We recognize that some people face challenges sharing their true gender identity with others, and this setting gives people the ability to express themselves in an authentic way. The expanded custom gender option is available to everyone who uses Facebook in US English.”

The change is not yet available to users who have their language set to UK English.

A video uploaded by the Ad Council for ‘Love Has No Labels’, shows a crowd having their expectations challenged when two people appear as skeletons in an X-Ray style projection on large screens. Then when the ‘skeletons’ appear from behind the screen we see the slogans ‘Love has no.....race ../age barrier ../gender ../religion, etc.’ It pleased the crowd in Brighton.



But these were the pictures which evoked the greatest sadness about what is *not*.

We have become so used to depictions of hatred between Jews and Muslims that love comes as a shock.



THE DEATH of LEELAH ALCORN http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Leelah_Alcorn

Please contact the editor to see a summary of the extensive, sometimes violent, sometimes wise reactions on the internet

WARNING –You may find some of what follows distressing or annoying. (Ed)

On Dec 28th 2014, 17-year-old Leelah Alcorn took her own life* by stepping in front of an articulated lorry on highway 17. She had come out as trans to her parents, who refused to support her transition. She published a suicide note on Tumblr, which was later deleted. I have partially reconstructed it from online evidence:

"My mom started taking me to a therapist, but would only take me to Christian Therapists, (who were all very biased) so I never actually got the therapy I needed to cure me of my depression. I only got more Christians telling me that I was selfish and wrong and that I should look to God for help. When I was 16, I realized my parents would never come around and I would have to wait until I was 18 to start any kind of medical treatment to transition to being a female. That absolutely broke my heart. I felt hopeless, that I was just going to look like a man in drag for the rest of my life. I cried myself to sleep that night.

I told my friends I was transgender. I came out as gay at school, and was supported by friends but it made my parents angry. They wanted me to be their perfect little straight Christian boy, and that's obviously not what I wanted. My mom took away my access to social media because she said I was looking at "inappropriate" things on the Internet. This was probably the part of my life when I was the most depressed, and I'm surprised I didn't kill myself. I was completely alone for 5 months. No friends, no support, no love. Just my parents' disappointment and the cruelty of loneliness.

It's all come to feel like too much. Raising enough money to move out of home, keeping my grades up and facing people at church who had only judgment for me. I can't do it. I'm never going to find a man who loves me. I'm never going to be happy.

Give all of my things and money to the transgender civil rights movement and to transgender support groups. The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated the way I was, they're treated like humans, with valid feelings and human rights. Gender needs to be taught about in schools, the earlier the better. My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. ... Fix society. Please."

***[Note: A study by the U.S. 'National Center for Transgender Equality' found that 41% of 6,450 responding transgender and gender nonconforming people had attempted suicide.]**

A vigil was held in Trafalgar Square for Leelah in the first week of January. The crowd lit candles to honour Leelah, and a moment of silence was held, as others gave speeches. Former Lib Dem councillor Sarah Brown said: "These conversion therapists are killing our young people through their fraudulence, their negligence, their incompetence. The lawmakers and regulators who should be stopping them are not. Leelah's dying wish was that we work to make these things better. A good start would be to stop frauds and charlatans from pushing trans people into suicide through fraudulent, negligent and incompetent therapy that is worse than useless, and if they do, to ensure that they face justice for it. I, for one, intend to make our lawmakers try."

Novelist and poet Roz Kaveney read a poem in memorial of Leelah:



Silenced she silence chose. She never heard
a loving voice call her by her true name.
Silent she spoke for all who felt the same
and did not could not speak. Hers was the word
that echoed voiceless, screamed repeated pain
they had not let her speak. Locked her away
from face and voice and self she tried to say.
Breathless she said. A dull thud yet again
breaks in our heart. But not the same this time.
She left her words as will and witness. Chose
to end, but not to let the grave enclose
her testament. I put it in a rhyme.
Leelah is dead. Her voice is not yet passed.
She speaks that of such deaths hers might be last.

Despite the death, Leelah's mother Carla Alcorn continues to refuse to use female pronouns, saying:

"We don't support that. But we told him that we loved him unconditionally. We loved him no matter what. I loved my son. People need to know that I loved him. He was a good kid, a good boy."

Conservative Christian writer Gina Miller blamed Leelah's suicide on demon possession. 8th Jan 2015

In an article published on US site 'Renew America', Ms Miller wrote about Leelah Alcorn's suicide, misgendering her and placing the blame on mental illness and demons. Ms Miller said of Leelah's parents: "From the stories I've read, they cared very deeply for their son, and they knew he had serious mental problems. They tried to get help for him, and I would guess they prayed their hearts out for him, but in the end, he chose the tragic final solution, as do many other people who absurdly believe they are the opposite sex."

She went on to discuss her belief in demon possession: "Not everyone will like to hear this, but demon possession certainly plays a part in homosexuality and "transgenderism." In the Bible, we see that demon possession was commonly acknowledged and understood to be prevalent, but the knowledge of it has been largely lost or buried today, as if our "modern" culture is too "smart" to give credence to the reality of spiritual forces at work in people today, just as they were then. We often read that some who are homosexual or "transgender" have believed this since they were children. Demons do not spare children any more than adults. In Mark, chapter 9, we read of the father who comes to Jesus asking that the Lord help free his son from demon possession. Jesus asks the father how long his son has been possessed, and the father tells Him "since he was a child." How many of these cases today are demon-related? I don't know, but it is certainly a factor."

Sadly, at least one 'copy-cat suicide' has occurred since - Zander Mahaffey (reported 19th February)

The Sibyls is What you Make It.. Can You Get Involved?

FOUNDING PURPOSE: The Sibyls was founded in 1996 to provide a *confidential* Christian spirituality support group for all transgender people, their families and supporters. In the early days much of this support was given through the organisation of confidential and exclusive weekend meetings, normally two in any one year, the distribution of the newsletter, a postal contact system and the availability of people to lend a listening ear.

These Sibyls meetings always involved a **communion service**. For the Sibyls members to be able to take communion as themselves, and not as they are forced to be, was then (and still is) a deep and lasting spiritual experience. The Sibyls welcome members equally from all denominations and over the years, communion services from different traditions have been held.

CHANGES: For some, the need to maintain a very high degree of confidentiality still remains as important as it ever was, but for others the changes in society have meant that they can be much more open, and **some may be completely open** about their situation.

A consequence of this is that the Sibyls can run a **wider variety of events**.

- In 2014 Sibyls ran a **private weekend** at the Windermere URC Centre. A private weekend at Windermere is planned again for 2016.
- This May the Sibyls are running a **weekend at Hilfield Priory** in Dorset, details of which are available in the Newsletter.
- A further **private day meeting at the Sisters of St Andrew** in Lewisham is being planned for the autumn.
- A separate **special meeting for married couples** is also being arranged.
- In addition to these the Sibyls holds a **London Evening meeting in St Anne's Soho** on the second Thursday, every other month.
- **Sibyls house group meetings** have also taken place and a liturgy is available for anyone who wishes to hold a house group service.

Ideas for other types of meeting will always be welcome, but meetings can only take place if people who are prepared to run these events come forward and offer their services.

Sibyls is a national organisation and we have always tried to spread the location of the events throughout the country as widely as we can; but what we can do is limited by the resources we have, and we are concerned that certain areas can unavoidably be left out.

Therefore **we need you** to offer to organise events, particularly those which take place on an area or regional basis. Please look at what is or is not happening in your area, consider what you can offer and the support you can give.

Clearly we need to ensure that the **confidentiality** of members who need it is maintained, but we can always help by contacting all members in a particular region for you, and we will always aim to give you the support that you need.

Please take the first step by emailing us on enquiries@sibyls.co.uk to let us know what you can offer and what you would like to do. We look forward to hearing from you. With best wishes, Susan Gilchrist

Hospital regulations require a wheel chair for patients being discharged. However, while working as a student nurse, I found one elderly gentleman already dressed and sitting on the bed with a suitcase at his feet, who insisted he didn't need my help to leave the hospital. After a chat about rules being rules, he reluctantly let me wheel him to the elevator. On the way down I asked him if his wife was meeting him.

'I don't know,' he said. 'She's still upstairs in the bathroom changing out of her hospital gown.'

I was walking down the street when I was accosted by a particularly dirty and shabby-looking homeless woman who asked me for a couple of pounds for dinner.

I took out my purse, took out a ten pound note and asked, "If I give you this money, will you buy wine with it instead of dinner?"

"No I had to stop drinking years ago", the homeless woman told me.

"Will you use it to go shopping instead of buying food?" I asked.

"No, I don't waste time shopping," the homeless woman said. "I need to spend all my time trying to stay alive."

"Will you spend this on a beauty salon instead of food?" I asked.

"Are you crazy?" replied the homeless woman. "I haven't had my hair done in 20 years!"

"Well," I said, "I'm not going to give you the money ... Instead, I'm going to take you out for dinner with my husband and me tonight."

The homeless woman was shocked. "Won't your husband be furious with you for doing that? I know I'm dirty, and I probably smell pretty disgusting."

I said, "That's OK – It's important for him to see what a woman looks like after she has given up shopping, hair appointments, and wine."