



SIBYLS NEWS



Issue no. 78 December 2016



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The history of the Situation for trans people in Iran. *Just for comparison!*

THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People

c/o 10, Ffordd Las, Rhyl, LL18 2DY

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

The Sibyls is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, their partners and their supporters. It offers companionship along the journey, and information/advocacy to churches.

Sibyls seek to fulfil the two great commandments of Jesus: To love God and love one another. To achieve this we provide opportunities to meet in safe and friendly establishments. We promote the freedom to talk, to learn, to pray and to seek God's will.

If you are having difficulties reconciling your faith with being transgendered or are concerned about acceptance in your church then maybe Sibyls is what you have been looking for. It could be that you just need to talk with fellow Christians who understand what it is to be transgendered, or simply wish to be yourself as you worship in fellowship and in a safe environment.

If you are looking for an accepting church, it may be useful to visit our website, where there is a resource for this. Go to the Resources page on <http://www.gndr.org.uk/sibyls5/indexmain.htm> Click on the "Pastoral" and then on the "Churches" tab. This is being updated, but has useful links. Especially supportive are the MCC Churches.

We like to know of churches which welcome transgender people. Also if you would like more information to give to your church please do contact us.

We welcome new members, young and old. There is no membership fee or annual subscription, and no commitment,

Sibyls Website - www.sibyls.co.uk

- Dates and information on future events are posted on the website
- A full range of resources is also available. Click on the "Resources" tab on the right of the top banner on the website to access these.

There is also a member's section for which a Username and password is required.

The current username for the member's section is **SibylsWeb** (all one word). The password is **4All-Members** (All one word: use uppercase and lowercase as indicated)

Forthcoming Sibyls events:

15 Dec 2016, 9 Feb, 13 April, 8 June, 10 Aug, 12 Oct, 14 Dec 2017 - St. Anne's, Soho

The Meetings start at 6:00 p.m. Access and other details on next page.

18TH November 2017 - Sibyls Reflective Day at The Sisters Of St Andrew, Lewisham

22 - 24 October 2017 - Weekend at Hilfield Priory

EDITORIAL carol.nixon2012@btinternet.com or Tyngwndwn, Penuwch, Tregaron SY25 6RA

Thanks to all who contributed or let their work be included. Please could all Sibyls try to write something when the muse strikes - short or long, anon. if you want. The sharing of our experience and vision can often be very healing, especially for a new member, who finds a new and loving community which understands. Next copy date 5th March.



Request from Euro forum for volunteers

Dear All,

The European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups has run a successful mentoring programme for encouraging and helping potential leaders in LGBT groups, mainly in Eastern Europe. The main area was Eastern Europe, and (as usual) transgender did not feature widely.

The Forum is now considering a second programme, this time covering the whole of Europe, and widening it to include transgender. We are looking for trans people who could act as trainers/mentors next year. This will involve a training week somewhere in Europe (TBA), for which expenses will be paid.

The sort of skills and areas required are as follows:

- Group dynamics and dealing with group conflicts
- Basics of leading worship
- Basics of queer reading of the bible
- Biographical work
- Relating to church leaders
- Dealing with (religious) homo- and trans*phobia
- Exchange with others in the training group
- Biographical work
- Gender biases and how to deal with it
- Knowing others "like me" in leadership positions
- Having a mentor to discuss specific as well as general questions

If you are interested, please contact me [\[via the editor\]](#) for further details.

Elaine Sommers (Co-president, European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups)

Editor's address: Tyngwndwn, Penuwch, Tregaron SY25 6RA email carol.nixon2012@btinternet.com

SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

NEXT MEETINGS: 15 DECEMBER 2016 Please note change in Date

6:00 p.m. at St Anne's Church, Dean Street, Soho.

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

THE SERVICE IS OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE, TO THEIR FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS

Come in whatever role is convenient at the time

During the intercessions we normally pray for those we know and also on behalf of others who would like our prayers. If you would like your name, or the name of someone you know to be included on the prayer list, please email me. You can email me privately at sgen4144@gmail.com. (

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

St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, is 50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.30 a gathering at a Soho restaurant. You can just turn up on the evening, but it would also be helpful to get some idea of numbers in advance. If you do know you are coming, please email me at sgen4144@gmail.com.

We normally decide on the restaurant at the end of the service. If you are late please ring 07546 213 971.

The dates for 2017 are 9 February, 13 April, 8 June, 10 August, 12 October, 14 December 2017

Remember it's 6:00 p.m. Susan

Reflection for the 20th November 2016

“Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?”



Sonia, (in the picture) was murdered by being pushed under an underground train while she on her way to an autumn series lecture at St Martin-in-the-Fields. As a transgender person I was privileged to be asked to write a liturgy on behalf of the Corrymeela Community for a Transgender Day of Remembrance service. During the service people who have been murdered, or have died because of the violence and persecution of others are remembered. The day of remembrance was on the 20th November 2016. On that day a service took place at St James Church of England, West Hampstead, NW6 2AP. We remembered Sonia and all those who have died because of the calling they have faced to their name and identity.

In the four months since Brexit the number of reported hate crimes against transgender people rose to 858, reflecting a trebling in the last five years. This hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule reflects the challenges we today are facing: “Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare? Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?”

None of us are called by name to reinforce prejudice or to conform to the expectation of others. Jesus calls each one of us individually. His call is to our inner being to follow wherever it takes us. In the book of Samuel (1 Samuel 16:7) it is written "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

*“Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I’ll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I’ll move and live and grow in you and you in me”.*

Let each one of us seek to answer that call in our own ways, in our own lives.

Susan Gilchrist 20th November 2016

Please note: A number of Sibyls liturgies, including a liturgy to welcome a transgender person into a church are available on: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/liturgies/liturgies.htm>

WHO IS GOD?

Who is God?

**I stand and look
And in the distance there I see
Not God who loves me as I am
But how I’ve hidden God from me**

What is God?

**The Lord most High
Dispensing goodness to the world?
What I now see is God of hurt
The God of weakness true to me.**

Where is God?

Who stands beyond:

Assessing all I think and do

**Or is it God who lives His life?
Fulfilling all I seek in me**

How does God?

**Who in this world
Condone the hunger, hurt and pain
Yet through the struggles, toil and strife
Can help us all to live again**

Is this the God?

**The God of Hate
In battles fought by people’s tribes
No this is God, the God of Love
Who welcomes all: with no divides.**

Susan Gilchrist 17th September 2016

Instant Poem which was written in the morning of the Sibyl’s Reflective day at the Sisters of St Andrew on the 17 Sept. 2016.

For a full poetry anthology see:

Gilchrist, S. 2011. “Verses in Search of the Self”. <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/301V-VersesSearchOfSelf-PoetryAnthology.pdf>

Reflections on Hilfield 28 - 30 October 2016

by Pauline Elanor Fleck

Getting there was pleasant and easy with none of last year's problems of choked bank holiday roads and late and exhausted arrivals. What also worked much better was all eating together. Susan and Jan did a magnificent job with the catering and will be a difficult act to follow. Self-catering for breakfast and dinner and having lunch with the community (and also of course praying with the community) meant we had plenty of time for sharing with each other but also for feeling part of the wider community and hopefully contributing to it. Even the weather was wonderfully benevolent with the gentle sunshine and still air feeling more spring-like than autumnal.

Always a great joy to be re-united with old friends and to meet new ones. Friendship between Sibyls seems to happen instantaneously, reflecting no doubt the deep affinity that exists between us and that we can have with few others: there is no group of people with whom I feel more welcomed, supported and at home.

The theme of the weekend was the Travellers' Way and at first I was puzzled at that, thinking perhaps that it meant little more than the obvious fact that life is a journey (though for trans people it can be a more difficult and circuitous one). However, the talk by the community's Jonathan – who combines the roles of chaplain to the travelling community (gypsies etc) with that of the community's handyman, with trousers to match – opened my eyes. I realised I knew little about travellers and much of what I did know was based on ignorance and prejudice – the idea, e.g. that gypsies are all thieves, whether of chain saws or even children. Just, in fact, as trans people are misunderstood, caricatured and frequently marginalised and even persecuted. One cannot press the comparison too far but it is certainly there and made me think. One can romanticise as well as demonise traveller life but it is true that in many cases they do not seek the kinds of security in terms of homes and jobs to which we attach so much importance. So in that sense they are closer to the spirit of Christ the itinerant preacher. An excellent talk which provoked much lively discussion.

The workshop led by Tina on Saturday morning was another highlight. She announced that the book she has been co-authoring on the pastoral care of trans people – a kind of sequel to *This is My Body* had been accepted for publication, sometime in 2018. We discussed some of the insights gained in the course of the research for the book but to start off Tina challengingly asked each of us to describe our own image of God. The answers were fascinatingly various but I was particularly struck, if she will not mind me mentioning it, by Robin's extraordinarily positive image of a God so close to her heart that she described Him as her lover. Amazing and inspiring. The discussion resolved itself into an exploration of whether being trans is to be regarded as a curse or a blessing. For once some words from Deuteronomy were relevant here, where Moses says "See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: a blessing if you obey the commandments of Yahweh our God...a curse if you disobey the commandments..." Moses was speaking of the entry by the Israelites into the promised land. Some trans people, often after a long journey through the desert, do reach, if not quite the promised land, at least a state of rest and acceptance of themselves which can sometimes open the way to a deeper relationship with God but in other cases, after hurtful rejection by church leaders and communities, actually turns them away from God. The narratives in *This is My Body* bear powerful testimony to that.

Our conclusion I think was that that being trans can and should be seen as a gift and a blessing and may become more widely seen as so in the future but for many older trans people especially the attitude of churches, society and even families has made it feel much more like a curse. The forthcoming book on the pastoral care of trans people will hopefully be another step in erasing that sense of curse and stigma that stubbornly persists, especially in the minds of some Church leaders.

After enjoying a convivial lunch with the community, we had some free time in the afternoon and a chance to enjoy the lovely weather and grounds of the Friary. We again feasted royally at dinner after which Brother Sam talked to us quietly and gently about St Francis who, though presumably cisgendered, is an outstanding example of someone willing to make great sacrifices in pursuit of personal wholeness and integrity and faithfulness to God's call. It is a sign of hope in our dark world that the pope has taken

Reflections on Hilfield (p.2)

the name of Francis and written so powerfully in *Laudato Si* of the need to live more simply and as guardians who are responsible for the natural world (of which we are an inseparable part) rather than set apart as ruthless dominators and exploiters.

Sunday morning as usual was business time. I observed one or two people nodding off during this but of course Sibyls cannot function without the people who give so generously of their time, especially those on the committee and Carol who does such a fantastic job as newsletter editor and quite rightly feels disappointed when the newsletter is sent forth and little if anything comes back. The most significant part of the meeting for me was that I found myself inexplicably volunteering to organise next year's weekend at Hilfield (which will be in September). At least I shall have retired from the Department of Health by then. And Deirdre, who is far more efficient and organised than me, agreed to help.

This brings me to the climactic event of the Sibyls' Eucharist celebrated beautifully and movingly by Tina – almost con-celebrated by all of us as we each contributed an intercession, said a sentence of the Eucharistic Prayer in turn and administered the body of Christ to one another. I don't know how many rules of the Catholic Church I broke and nor do I care – I was just delighted to stand united with my brothers and sisters in Christ and to celebrate the wonderful diversity of God's creation.

It remains for me to thank Susan and Jan for organising this wonderful event and all my fellow Sibyls for affirming and supporting me. One of the best parts of every weekend is the informal conversations, both intense and meaningful and casual and amusing, that we have with each other. Thank you to you all and I look forward eagerly to seeing you all next year.

The ethics of making children aware of trans issues

Elaine wrote the following letter to her local paper in mid-November. I asked permission to include it because the basic issue is one we perhaps should all reflect on. Please compare page 19, item 2.

"I have just watched CBBC's *Just a Girl*, the subject of the CEN Editorial of 4 November. I am disappointed with some of the writer's disparaging remarks, especially as he doesn't appear to have seen the film himself (the story is actually about a boy transitioning to a girl, not the other way round!). Is the BBC really suggesting that changing gender is a 'good idea', simply by informing children about transgender? Well, I suppose it is for a child with gender dysphoria, offering the possibility of being able to live in accord with their gender identity. That can be a life-saver.

Are parents worried that their children might be influenced by this sort of media exposure and become trans themselves? I can assure them that in over twenty years of talking with trans people, I have yet to meet a person who actually chose to be trans. This isn't something which you can catch or copy. What is true is that most of them came to a realisation that they were different whilst they were children, some of them as young as five. The other common feature was that they didn't dare to disclose their feelings to anyone, not even their parents, for fear of discovery, ridicule, or bullying.

What this film was trying to do was to introduce the topic of transgender to children, in the hope of reducing the risk of bullying and abuse, and encouraging them to befriend and support any trans children they might encounter along the way.

Fifty years ago, at the boys school I attended, such things were never mentioned. I had little choice but to keep my own feelings a closely guarded secret, not daring to tell anyone until I was well into my twenties. It took many more decades for the resultant trauma to heal, allowing me to accept who I was, without shame or fear. It is my hope and prayer that trans children today will have the help and support which my generation never had, and that they will be encouraged to flourish as themselves, growing up in a society which is thankfully becoming more tolerant, accepting and inclusive.

Oh, and it would be even better if the Church could do the same."

Hilfield - a personal experience



Hi: my name is Rebecca Williams and I'm quite new to Sibyls. I'm a 50+, 6ft, 15st t-girl who came back out of the closet in May after nearly 20 years. I made it to the London services in June and August, but that can be tricky, so I jumped at the chance to go to Hilfield. I will be honest and say that the opportunity to spend an entire weekend dressed was a big motivation, but as a Christian of 40 years I was overjoyed when I found find Sibyls on-line, so the spiritual opportunity and support were just as important.

On the Friday, I loaded up a large proportion of my wardrobe, got myself ready and arrived a little later than planned in the afternoon, following a journey that was in reality less tortuous than it felt. That evening flew by.

The theme was 'The Travellers Way' which I guess is reported in more detail elsewhere, as well as the wonderful hospitality we received from the community. We heard from two of the brothers over the weekend and had our own session about pastoral care for trans people, led by Tina. Although it is becoming a bit of a cliché now, our lives are indeed a journey of discovery in many ways, both in the physical and spiritual realms. For us to be together like this was a fantastic opportunity to share our own diverse stories and be encouraged through this. Sharing communion with the community on Saturday and as Sibyls on Sunday were especially precious times.

Saturday afternoon was left fluid and some opted for a walk or to spend time together. Rather like a child let loose in a sweet shop, I indulged myself in a frivolous self-organised photo shoot: I apologise for such selfishness but I couldn't pass up the chance to snap myself in different outfits. I was pleased with the results, and flattered by the compliments over a couple of my dresses. A lady volunteer at the Friary commented that she had been looking at one of them on-line and wondered what it looked on someone! My profound thanks also go to Robyn who held my arm while I tried out walking in 'killer' heels again (which turned out to be 5" and not 4" as I thought!!), on the unexpectedly numerous downhill treks back to Juniper House.

At Sunday lunch, the dining room was rather warm, so between courses I decided to step outside for some fresh air and felt drawn to the chapel. I went in to spend a private moment with the Lord and knelt before him to offer myself to his plans. I have no real idea what he has in mind but one thing that has made my second 'incarnation' far less difficult (at least for me) is that I believe he wants to use me for his Kingdom and that has given me peace. This was a very precious, if short, personal moment: I then headed back as I realised my apple crumble and custard would be on the table!

After lunch we hugged and said our goodbyes, having had a wonderful time together and made new friends. Then I sadly had to change back to go home. My wife is really struggling but I'm hoping that she will be able to talk one day with some of the other wives.

In life generally I have progressively become more comfortable with the realisation that I understand less of the mysteries of God as I go along. What is key is that we know we are his children, loved and safe in his arms, guided by his hand and that we undertake this journey together, as we did at Hilfield.



Hilfield Debutante!

Yvonne Taylor

Since the euphoria of Windermere in May, I've been re-united with the God of unconditional love, after ten incredibly tough and lonely years in which the God of wrath, vengeance and judgment, projected by those seeking to demonise my human identity, has been an ever present threat to my whole life and well-being.



I really needed some time to refocus on God in the company of people who care and the Sibyls weekend with the Franciscan Brothers of Hilfield Friary didn't disappoint. On arrival, volunteer Simon showed me to the house allocated for our stay and a first encounter with Brother Giles was warm and friendly. The bigoted, materialistic toxicity of home was instantly blown away by the stunning peace and beauty of the Friary's rural surroundings and the purity of God's love manifest by the Brothers, volunteers and my fellow Sibyls. I'd barely taken my bags from the car to my room, when I met one of the volunteers raking up leaves. My offer of help was instantly accepted and I spent the rest of the afternoon gainfully employed and feeling more like a volunteer than a guest!



Susan's efficient organisation meant meal preparation, clearing up and the Sibyls weekend agenda all ran smoothly, in between joining the Brothers for prayer or Eucharist at every opportunity.

On Friday evening, Brother Jonathan spoke about his work among Romany, gypsy, and traveller communities, often misrepresented in similar ways to transgender people which resonated with me greatly. On Saturday evening, Brother Samuel spoke about the history of the Franciscan Order and the life shared by the Brothers and volunteers at Hilfield. Sandwiched in between, Tina Beardsley led a thought-provoking workshop on the pastoral care of transgender people; the subject of a new Sibyls book based upon Chris Dowd's research and due for publication in 2018. A stimulating discussion revealed the breadth of different views on what constitutes good practice, dovetailing nicely with some reading I've been doing recently.

In her books, *Cranky Beautiful Faith* (2013: Canterbury Press; ISBN 978-1-84825-531-9) and *Accidental Saints - Finding God In All The Wrong People* (2015: Canterbury Press; ISBN 978-1-84825-823-5), Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber tells her own story of encounter with the God of wrath and judgement in her fundamentalist Church of Christ upbringing, her recovery from a juicy drug and alcohol habit, re-discovery of God and His unconditional love through the Lutheran Church, seminary, ordination and House For All Sinners And Saints (HFASS), the church she founded in Denver Colorado USA for 'her people'; fellow comics, recovering addicts and some of the LGBTIAQ+ community.

As Brother Jonathan spoke to us, I was reminded of Nadia's story and the parallels not just between transgender people and the gypsy-traveller community but also with some of her congregation, like Stuart the drag queen and transsexual Asher (F-M), similarly reviled by many in church and society for simply being the way God made them to be. Nadia's HFASS community positively celebrates rather than simply tolerates those considered 'not like us'! Through the telling and sharing of stories, transparency before God, knowing that whether pastor or congregation, we all need God's grace and forgiveness every day, deep spiritual, psychological and emotional wounds are being healed through some stunning acts of faith, love, forgiveness and reconciliation from among those unwelcome in many mainstream churches.

When a straight, white corporate guy and some 'soccer mom's join this eclectic faith community because they experience an authenticity missing from other churches, we see the power of God's unconditional, transforming love for every one of us; gypsy-traveller, gay, straight, transgender, drag queen, transvestite, intersex, bisexual, short, tall, well-endowed or slim, able bodied or not, employed or not, Franciscan, Methodist, URC, Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, liberal, evangelical or fundamentalist. It's not about who any one of us is or how anyone-else sees us but who God is and how He delights in what He sees in the hearts of each one of us who loves Him. I heartily recommend Nadia's books to you.

This weekend, all of us were truly one together in Christ, outcast, sinner, servant, beloved of God, loving and serving one another and sharing stories together as Jesus, his disciples and the people they met did. This wonderful Franciscan community, my fellow Sibyls and Nadia Bolz-Weber remind me that we can neither earn nor lose what is God's freely given gift of love to us all. I encourage us to extend this love to our brothers, sisters and children of the gypsy, Romany and traveller communities in prayer that God will bless them and provide for all their needs. "Bind us together Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken. Bind us together Lord, bind us together, bind us together in love." I didn't want the weekend to end but left Hilfield desiring a return visit soon, feeling loved unconditionally and energised for whatever God has in store for the rest of my life.



The 'Sibyls Together' meeting at Hilfield Friary 30.10.16 written up by Susan Gilchrist

1. Susan gave a brief report of the Committee's activities during the previous year

2. Book Launch - Tina reported that the Sibyls' book "This is My Body" is now going for reprint. If anyone spots any errors, please let her know. A Northern Launch Event for the book would be held on Friday 25th November, 1pm to 3pm, with contributors Chris Dowd and Jasmine Woolley and co-editor, Christina Beardsley, at the Brynmor Jones Library, the University of Hull.

3. The Transgender Care Manual co-edited by Christina Beardsley and Chris Dowd has been accepted for publication by Darton Longman and Todd.

4. Transgender Day of Remembrance Service and Open Table Event

Susan reported on this. At the request of the Corrymeela Community she has written a liturgy for this which is being widely circulated. On this day those who have been murdered or died during the previous year because they were transgender are remembered. A liturgy for a service is available on www.corrymeela.org/tdor2016.

5. Open Table London

On the third Sunday of each month. Next meeting was to be on 20th November 2016 at [St James Church of England, West Hampstead](#), NW6 2AP. Refreshments 6.30pm, service 7pm, followed by a meal. The Transgender day of Remembrance will be observed during the service

6. Newsletter

Carol reported on this. She puts a lot of effort into this but gets very little or no feedback even when this is asked for. She is questioning whether this is worth the effort when she gets so little response. Various options were discussed, including shorter letters, more frequent newsletters, and editing to promote greater online contact. The meeting reassured Carol that they valued the Newsletter in its present format and the effort she puts into this very much. Carol said she would prepare a series of questions relating to the Newsletter and this was referred to the Committee for further discussion.

7. LGBTI Anglican Coalition

Susan outlined the present unsatisfactory position. Susan had emailed the present Chairperson of the LGBTI Coalition and LGBTI Mission on various occasions on behalf of the Sibyls about the need to ensure that there is adequate representation and expertise on transgender matters within the LGBTI Mission. She has pointed out that we have discussed this in the Sibyls' committee and we consider it unsatisfactory our requests for information have been ignored. She will email the Chairperson again to point out that the next Sibyls committee meeting is on the 23rd November and to ask that he provides the Sibyls committee a full account of the current situation, including the arrangements which have been made within the mission to ensure that the concerns we have expressed have been, and are currently being, addressed. Susan indicated that these difficulties may have arisen because of power struggles that seem to be taking place.

8. Sibyls Web Presence and Facebook Groups - Debbie has been investigating the appropriateness of Facebook groups.

There was a feeling that prevarication has gone on too long and it is time to move forward. It was considered that two groups are appropriate. 1. A secret group for communication between Sibyls members. 2. An open unofficial group for general communication (similar to that run by Changing Attitude) Susan has been discussing some of these issues with Diverse Church. Debbie and Susan will put recommendations to the Committee.

9. Sibyls 2017 Programme: ... Spring/Early Summer Weekend - Yvonne Wood, Carol Belfield and Elaine Sommers are organising this. It is hoped that provision for a Couples programme will be provided within the weekend. Date and location t.b.c.

London Meetings - Susan will continue to run these as previously. Dates for 2017 meetings are already on the website.

Reflective Day - Booked for 18th November at the Sisters of St Andrew, Lewisham. Susan will continue to run this event.

Future Hilfield Weekend - It was agreed that a further Hilfield weekend should be run in 2017. A booking has been made for the 22-24 September 2017. Pauline Fleck and Deirdre Bunney have volunteered to run the event. Catering arrangements to be the same as those for this event, i.e. lunch with the Brothers for all attendees and self-catering for all other meals. Hilfield are very happy with these arrangements.

10. Greenbelt - Continued attendance at Greenbelt was felt to be important. **Greenbelt 2017 will take place Friday 25 to Monday 28 August** at Boughton House, near Kettering. It is proposed that arrangements are made to use the Outerspace tent as previously. Volunteers are needed. Val Robert, Richard and Frances Skinner indicated that they may be able to do this. (Note from Susan: I suggest that Sibyls buys the volunteer(s) a ticket(s) for the event: £150 before the end of April)

11. Exhibitions and Exhibition Material - Sibyls have increasingly been asked to participate in exhibitions. An Sibyls exhibition stand was provided for the Oasis Church conference earlier this year. These exhibitions require additional publicity material and it is recommended that a roller type exhibition banner is purchased for use in future exhibitions. These cost from £50.

12. Standing Order in Newsletter - Sibyls does not charge anything for membership and it was agreed that this is extremely important and should not be changed. However, without a reliable income stream it was considered that this creates an inhibition to spend. After discussion it was recommended that a standing order form in every issue of the newsletter would encourage members to make voluntary regular donations.

SIBYLS' WEEKEND AT HILFIELD: 29th October 2016 – TRANSGENDER CARE WORKSHOP

What are our images of God?

- Mystery ('cloud of unknowing') and the divine heart (of love) revealed in Jesus.
- A changing image: the more I go on, the more I don't know. Also Father, Lord, Saviour and presence.
- The Creator who wows me as I kayak along the Jurassic coastline – the sense of awe.
- Not having an image of God but being aware of a presence.
- The divine Creator around me, not defined by buildings and denominations – it takes time to fight off childish imagery for God
- Two images of God: in Christ, loving, merciful, forgiving but in the Old Testament punitive, judgemental and responsible for genocide.
- Moving from the latter to the former imagery, as in Psalm 103 (which is in the Old Testament) where God is described as merciful, gracious, abounding in steadfast love – the unconditional love of God
- Refusal to impose an image on God – words and images as allegories such as companionship, being, belonging
- God as love – a loving parent – Father/Mother/Lover
- A barrelling surge of energy pushing all before it and utterly beyond words; also the image of an inverted brain pulsating with energy.
- No image – God is all pervading love and permeates everything.
- Love, forgiveness, presence with us.
- God is my counsellor.
- As a male I serve God, being my female self allows me to be myself and I am able to live in God's loving presence.

Transgender Care - *Definitions of how we conceptualise pastoral care*

- It most definitely is not telling someone what to do.
- It can be perceived as something 'done' to us whereas it needs to be gentle and reciprocal.
- To be there with the person and find ways to love the whole person.
- The term 'pastoral' can be pejorative and the church ts default association but it is used in other contexts, e.g. education.
- Pastoral care implies care of the spirit.
- Jesus asked people 'what do you want me to do for you?' – it is about accepting people as they are, accepting their truth.
- Care for those who push our buttons is challenging but necessary.
- It is reciprocal and a meeting of peers rather than hierarchical.
- Pastoral care happens when we come alongside and stand alongside others – this is so powerful.
- We need not totally understand the other person.
- It is often personal/intimate – a relationship with one or two people and the dynamics are different if a larger number of people are involved.
- It is about support.

A key question was posed: ***Are our pastors and religious communities equipped to deal with the special needs of trans people?***

a. Our experience as variant gender people/significant others of bad or inadequate pastoral care:

- 'I've never seen it!'
- There is a poor base line of pastoral care anyway in our communities.
- Trans people are often approached with caution or with a question mark.
- There is toleration rather than acceptance.
- Removal of support by religious communities often happens when we most need it, when there is loss of employment or family.
- A negative Church culture or ethos can lead us to be passive in Church rather than engage.
- Leaders (the example of a head teacher in a school) can create a negative culture in which the trans person becomes ostracised and demoralised [n this example the police were so different in their care and support of the individual concerned.]
- Our openness can be shut down.
- Leaders or communities can be unwilling to learn even when this is offered.
- Some communities are abusive.

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- The victim of abuse or inequality can be made to feel as if they were the cause or responsible for the problem.
- There can be a lack respect
- The assumption that dealing with one's gender variance in certain ways, because it affects others, is 'selfish' and chosen.
- Bad pastoral care impacts on us.
- Pastoral care can be withheld pending relationship changes that are dictated by theological assumptions – e.g. 'we'd like to help you (the spouse of the trans person) but can't until you divorce, and we feel bad about that'. In this example pastoral care is more about 'me' the care giver, rather than those in need of care and the reading of Scripture is selective – what about 'those whom God has joined together'?)
- It was also noted that some trans people have additional problems due to social class or status, for example, attack on their property in deprived neighbourhoods.
- Child protection processes can also be problematic similar to the suspicion of men working with children.

b. Our experience as variant gender people/significant others, of good and appropriate pastoral care:

- The old lady who shed tears 'for your years of pain' on learning that her friend had transitioned – someone really entering into another's suffering/experience.
- The senior manager who led and modelled equality when an employee transitioned, to the extent of walking with them round all the departments on the person's first day back at work.
- Mutual care – group care.
- Holding information that has been shared and allowing love and acceptance to flow from that.
- Pastoral care is proactive – as simple as asking how someone is.
- In unexpected and surprising ways – a Christmas card from an elderly client to someone who had recently transitioned.
- Those who don't understand nevertheless treating you as a human being and allowing you to be yourself.
- The role of practical wisdom: 'protecting' a newly transitioned teacher from a difficult year group in the first year of their transition..
- Training may be needed – in the past the police could be awful; trans awareness training has made many police forces exemplary.
- Pastoral care can involve rigour – insisting on boundaries if we are tempted to push them to test out whether someone really cares.

4. Priorities of care for gender variant people

We reviewed the 13 insights from Chris Dowd's dissertation, choosing our top three priorities.

Insights 6- 20 emerged as top priorities in the group but people found the limit of 3 restricting. It was agreed to re-circulate the 13 insights with a 5 point Lickert scale (strongly disagree/disagree/neither disagree nor agree/agree/strongly agree) at a later date and to work in two groups for the rest of the morning, exploring the two other insights that participants had also highlighted:

The diversity of life/creation should be valued and not labelled

Being trans is not something you'd wish on your worst enemy. It is not about being a man or a woman but yourself.

Group 1.

The group acknowledged the innate need humans have to label and the vital importance of label busting (which could be generational) and seeing the person not the label – the experience of disability was given as an example. Labelling involves making assumptions about people. Should one speak of trans men and women or simply of men and women? Either way there needs to be respect for all identities. We are still largely a tribal society in which being different is a problem. The person in front of us has feelings. Labelling involves making assumptions and is plagued by negativity. The spectrum of sexuality and gender was noted and the tendency to focus on those in the middle and mistrust those who consider themselves outside or beyond the spectrum. In France there is less information about trans identities but a rise in non-binary identity among the young.

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Concepts are just that: dress and behaviour are neutral. Learning to listen is vital as is the ability to live with two contradictory ideas: living with, while discounting instinctive responses. One social problem is that innate respect for other people has gone. The dynamic required could be summed up as construction – deconstruction – reconstruction.

A third, powerful theme also emerged. The Evangelical theology that led trans Christians to see being trans as a curse was hugely damaging and difficult to escape, and yet, it is possible, despite the loss, and huge anger with God, for one to come to a point of acceptance, a recognition that one is a pot in the hands of a potter who is unconditional love, and that if this God would have it so then to be trans can be a blessing both to us and to others.

Group 2:

This group explored this healing journey from seeing one's gender variance as a curse to discovering that it was a blessing and a gift, as well as the richness of the self. The levels of mental illness and suicide among trans people are alarming but it is possible to find God through transition. It was important to be out there so others can know us. The range of moral attitudes and behaviours among trans people is as great as among any other group and this raised the distinction between love and sex. The authority of Scripture was a huge issue: is it guidance or instruction and who decides which? In Fundamentalist circles one is told that one is wrong based, not on who we are, but on who others think we should be. A change is happening in Evangelicalism and is largely generational. Knowledge is important and a scientific resource on gender was needed [Susan's resource is available on line]. We are all in different places but it is essential to own our feelings. Seeing oneself as God's representative or as an ambassador requires responsibility and commitment to the common good. The older generation tend to regard their gender variance as curse and there is a terrible history of repression – can that be changed? Maybe the (non-binary) young are assisting this change.

Final comments included the importance of the clergy role and the necessity for an agreed principle of how we interpret the Bible.

'FORMS OF ADDRESS' *as with all headlines, I have the back story on file if you are interested - just ask!*

Oxford city council is introducing the gender-neutral title Mx and has said it is considering dropping the use of Mr, Ms, Miss and Mrs, because "they are not inclusive of transgender people". The former MP Ann Widdecombe told the Daily Mail the change was "a waste of time and money", and "another example of political correctness". 14 Sept 2016

The music streaming service Spotify has added 'non-binary' to registration forms in an industry first 19th Sept 2016

London Mayor Sadiq Khan is considering removing gender-specific terms, such as ladies and gentlemen, from Transport for London announcements after a trans woman was mocked by staff. 9th December 2016

A boss was accused of referring to a transgender staff member as "it". 4.10.16

'THE CHURCH' [LIKE THE CURATE'S EGG, GOOD IN PARTS.]

Church of England sets up group to discuss LGBT rights, doesn't invite anyone pro-LGBT 19th September 2016

A Christian legal group is defending a family who refuse to accept their transgender teenage son and claim he needs treatment for "gender confusion". 24th October 2016

A new chaplaincy service for the LGBTQIA+ community has been set up by the Diocese of St.Asaph. 16th Oct 2016

The Bishop of Buckingham, the Rt Revd Dr Alan Wilson, has called for reform in the Church of England, after a poll found just one third of people think that churches are generally welcoming of LGBT people. 27th October 2016

'MEDIA' A ground-breaking new Channel 4 documentary *Kids on the Edge* looks at issues faced by kids and the treatment of complex issues. 15th November 2016

Artist Grayson Perry has made four short films for Channel 4 exploring gender identity. 2nd Nov 2016

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/11/02/watch-grayson-perry-explores-gender-identity-in-short-film-series/>

Debbie Hayton writes an occasional blog, which your editor would highly recommend to anyone. This item (posted on 29.11.16) concerns a very important issue, which the trans community must address.

<https://debbiehayton.wordpress.com>

Caution urged when Parliament debates changes to trans rights

(PROTECTIONS MAY BE WEAKENED NOT STRENGTHENED IF SELF-DECLARATION REPLACES EXPERT TESTIMONY, AND GENDER IDENTITY REPLACES GENDER REASSIGNMENT AS A PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC.)

On 1st December 2016, the House of Commons will debate the motion:

*That this House notes the UK's status as a pioneer in legislating for equality for LGBT people; welcomes the Government's announcement of a new trans equality action plan; and calls on the Government to re-view its response to the recommendations of the Women and Equalities Committee's report on Transgender Equality to ensure that the UK leads the world on trans equality rights, in particular by giving unequivocal commitments to **changing the Gender Recognition Act 2004 in line with the principles of gender self-declaration** and replacing confusing and inadequate language regarding trans people in the Equality Act 2010 by **creating a new protected characteristic of gender identity**.*

As a transwoman, I am delighted that Parliamentary time is being devoted to trans rights. Trans people continue to face systemic discrimination and bias, so it is timely to review the legislation. However, the more I reflect on the two specific proposals in this motion, the more anxious I become.

The current protections are based on objective reality. The Equality Act 2010 created the protected characteristic, *Gender Reassignment*. It refers to something that people **do**: they change their name, their gender markers, their gender role, and they live full-time as a member of the opposite sex. These changes can be externally verified and, when corroborated by expert witnesses, used to secure full legal recognition through the Gender Recognition Act 2004. I don't enjoy being subject to scrutiny but it secures credibility to my transition that would be lost should these proposals be enacted.

Self-declaration of gender would weaken an already fragile protection. Discrimination can be fiendishly difficult to prove. A survey for TotalJobs earlier this year reported that 60% of trans people had experienced workplace discrimination, but cases are not being brought to Employment Tribunals. Rather, the law helps our allies feel confident that they are doing the right thing when they support trans rights. However, if someone can change their gender in the absence of any substantiating evidence, trans people and their allies may find it harder to convince the more antagonistic parts of society. It would certainly be far more difficult to defend against accusations that trans people are deluded, or that transition is something done on a whim.

Gender Identity is problematic because it is based purely on feelings. Unlike my gender reassignment, I cannot prove my gender identity. Whilst I can demonstrate that I live as a woman, I cannot provide any evidence that I think like a woman, or feel like a woman. The proposed law might require people in official positions to take trans people at their word, but it cannot regulate social groups that create their own boundaries. Transwomen in particular may find that goodwill is replaced by suspicion should abusive men spot an opportunity to exploit women's spaces and protections.

The real losers will not be those who are antagonistic to trans people, but trans people themselves. Protections may be weakened not strengthened if self-declaration replaces expert testimony, and gender identity replaces gender reassignment as a protected characteristic. We need to reflect on the reality of the society we live in before we rush into a world where facts are replaced by feelings and evidence is replaced by the ethereal. I have therefore asked my MP to oppose the motion, and I urge others to do likewise.

You may also wish to see Debbie's most recent post, in which she reports on the parliamentary debate.



The following piece was published in 'Physics World', as a contribution to an ongoing series entitled 'Lateral Thoughts'.

It seemed so evocative and amusing that the editor asked permission to reproduce it here.

Gender balance, one woman at a time by Debbie Hayton

What can be done to increase the number of women in physics? This question keeps committees busy and researchers funded, but the solution seems as elusive as squaring the circle. Four years ago, however, I did my bit: I transitioned from male to female. As this also meant that the number of men in physics was simultaneously reduced by one, it was, as they say in football, a "six-pointer".

I hasten to add that I didn't transition in order to improve the male-female ratio among physicists; that really would have been a remarkable thing to do. However, it did mean that when my wave function collapsed into the F state, I was able to conduct some controlled social observations in my work as a teacher. I'm the same person and I'm doing the same job, but in a different gender role.

After a degree, PhD and postdoctoral research I trained as a teacher in the mid-1990s. I've been teaching physics in secondary schools ever since, and the women-in-physics question has long played into my department's desire to increase the uptake of students taking A-level physics. We have been very successful in attracting boys but, whatever we try, the gender ratio has never strayed much from 4:1; if only the girls would sign up in equal numbers we really would be able to justify those glistening new laboratories that currently we can only dream about.

So, on 20 December 2012, the students in my school were sent home with letters to their parents informing them of an imminent and major change in my personal circumstances. Three weeks later they returned to school bright and eager, but probably with more than physics on their minds when they waited outside my lab. It was all very simple, I told them. Sir becomes Miss, he becomes she and – er – Dr Hayton becomes Dr Hayton. I knew that PhD would come in handy one day. From there life would go on pretty much as normal, as long as we all stood up straight (sometimes my classes even laugh at that joke).

The reaction from the students was wonderful. For two days I thought I had suddenly cracked the knotty problem of pupil indiscipline, as the corridor would fall silent as I walked around the school. However, the novelty value was short-lived and 48 hours later the same corridors were full of active children engaged in their conversations, oblivious to my presence as I passed them by. My relationship with my students reverted rapidly to what I had fostered over the years. It seemed that little had changed. My job was to teach them physics and their job was to learn. Or rather, their job was to try and get me to do as much of their learning as they could get away with. Theory was taught, questions were answered, experiments were one and written up, and attempts by students to sidetrack me from my lesson plans were successfully deflected. Or, at least, they were no more successful than previously. My gender role seemed irrelevant to any of this.

Some things were certainly different though. For 20 years my first lesson for Year 10 students on static electricity has involved me rubbing a balloon on my hair, leaping onto the front desk and placing the balloon on the ceiling, all in one sweeping dramatic movement. In January 2013 I taught two classes in Year 10. The first lesson passed without incident, which was good because I have never admitted the "leaping on the bench" bit to Health and Safety. The following day the other class sat in the same place as I geared up for a repeat performance. For some now forgotten reason, however, I had chosen to wear a skirt that day rather than trousers. I was already well into my run-up when I realized that the activity needed to be replanned as a matter of urgency. The class had to make do with the balloon being stuck to the wall on the other side of the room.

Some activities have definitely got better. I now join the other long-haired people on the styrofoam platform when the Van de Graaff generator comes out, and jewellery can be very useful when demonstrating magnetic and non-magnetic materials. Much of mine, it seems, is fabricated from mild steel rather than more precious materials. But in other respects I miss things that I took for granted. Moving heavy trolleys with dodgy wheels is more of a struggle as I have lost upper body strength and I have first-hand experience of the different way that men and women can be perceived when they open their mouths in meetings. I hasten to add that children seem remarkably free of the prejudices that seem to trouble some folks of my generation about women when it comes to physics and engineering. But does having a female teacher in years 10 and 11 help girls decide whether to take A-level physics? After four years the answer seems to be "probably not". Changing my gender role seems to have had no more effect than other strategies that I have employed over the years. What seems to be more important is good teaching, high expectations, a willingness to engage with our students and a love of our subject. But these things attract boys as well, and seemingly in greater numbers. Maybe we should congratulate ourselves for that?

In any case, I can sense a sigh of relief from my male colleagues: none of you need to take this particular plunge for the sake of physics.

The Evangelical Alliance by Stephenie

In the last Sibyls newsletter there was quite a write up about the Evangelical Alliance, the EA. I do know how much of an enemy they have been toward the Transgender community. I hope to balance this story with a little story of my own that I hope will encourage and amuse but will help you see that not every enemy is an enemy.

The year is 2004, the Gender Recognition bill is being hotly debated in parliament, the opposition with its Christian component seemed to be led by a Dr Don Horrocks (now retired). It was a strange and challenging time, but I failed to get my head around the idea that Christians in the guise of the EA would be so hateful toward the Trans community. Having spoken to a number of my Trans friends I was quickly condemned even threatened with a beating if I visited the EA to find out why they hate Trans people. Working nearby to the EA offices in Kennington it was possible to set up a meeting with Dr. Don Horrocks and so under pain of many threats I met with him after work. It felt like walking openly into the enemy camp!!

We sat, had a coffee and discussed the pro's and con's for two hours. We did not agree nor could see this eye to eye, so before leaving the EA offices I simply said to Dr Horrocks: "Look, we are never going to agree here, but that should not be an excuse for us not to be friends." Dr Horrocks seemed taken aback, commenting, "I have never met anyone quite like you.." We parted ways. The Gender Recognition Bill became an Act, receiving Royal Assent and came into being in 2005. What happened over the years that followed amazed me. Often when Dr Horrocks was in London he would contact me for a meeting at Kings Cross/St Pancras for a coffee and a chat.

We met about three times a year and in the early part of 2015 I received an invitation..... Dr Horrocks had invited me to his retirement party at the EA offices, now near to Kings Cross/St Pancras station. I did not know what to make of it – it was crazy, could I be walking into enemy territory, would I be got at if I went? Should I go? Imagine much prayer and seeking God went into this decision. Eventually I concluded if Daniel facing hungry lions did not get eaten then I must trust God and attend.

I found the EA offices after a lot of searching. There were many guests at this event and I had no idea what would happen to me, being the only Trans Christian there. Almost everyone new would ask me "How do you know Don Horrocks?" It was not worth lying. I find it hard to lie anyway, I am personally very uncomfortable with lies so simply told them the truth. To my utter amazement no one condemned me, further still some of the dignitaries were actively asking to meet me? 'Go figure' I thought to myself, it was not making any sense to me at all.

The time for speeches arrived and I had a copy of my book with me entitled 'A Light In The dark' an autobiography - not entirely Christian-focused but demonstrating how God stepped in at times of deepest, darkest challenge on the road to Transition from male to female. Don got up to say a few words and he themed his presentation on those colleagues who had most influence on him and those whom he had worked with at the EA.

About the 6th person in as Don spoke about how they each influenced him during his time at the EA, he said "now Stephenie Robinson...." 'Oh my, here it comes', I thought, bracing myself for a verbal assault - but it never came. Don was amazingly complimentary and stated that having had several meetings with me he had come to realise that their book on 'Transsexuality' had completely missed the human component, being written mostly as an academic piece. The day I changed his thinking was the day I said we can be friends even if we disagree. The EA took my copy of my book for their library.

Today I do not have a lot of contact with the EA but we never know how by being gentle and Christ-like the incredible influence we may be blessed with, to change enemies into friends. Many could not believe what had been achieved here, it just shows by trusting God much can be accomplished – Amen

[A note from the editor]: You may be interested in Stephenie's blog at <https://christianpolice.org.uk/>

We are blessed! (Submitted by Yvonne Taylor)

As you know, I'm a big fan of Lutheran Pastor, Nadia Bolz-Weber and the House For All Sinners and Saints church community she founded in Denver, Colorado USA. In her book 'Accidental Saints - Finding God in all the wrong people', she refers to a sermon she gave back in 2013 at All Saints, on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Ch.5-7). She ends with her updated version of The Beatitudes, which is uplifting, liberating and assures me of God's love. I share this in hope it will bless all of you as much as it has me.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Blessed are the agnostics. Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.
 Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information.
 Blessed are those who have nothing to offer. Blessed are they for whom nothing seems to be working.
 Blessed are the pre-schoolers who cut in line at communion.
 Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction.
 Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears are as real as an ocean.
 Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.
 Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried. Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted any more.
 Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.
 Blessed are the motherless, the alone, the ones from whom so much has been taken.
 Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet"
 Blessed are they who laughed again when for so long they thought they never would.
 Blessed are —'s wife and kids and —'s mom and ——'s friends. (insert your own names)
 Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
 Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex-workers and the night shift street sweepers.
 Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small. The parts of ourselves that don't want to make eye contact with a world that only loves the winners.
 Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted.
 Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.
 Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms.
 Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
 Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard - for they are those with whom Jesus chose to surround himself.
 Blessed are those without documentation. Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.
 Blessed are foster kids and trophy kids and special education kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved and never does.
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
 Blessed are they who know there has to be more than this. Because they are right.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
 Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.
 Blessed are the burnt-out social workers and the over worked teachers and the pro-bono case takers.
 Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak.
 Blessed are they who delete hateful, homophobic comments off their friend's Facebook page.
 Blessed are the ones who have received such real grace that they are no longer in the position of ever deciding who the "deserving poor" are.
 Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.
 Blessed are the merciful for they totally get it.

Nadia concludes by saying:

"See, I like to imagine Jesus here blessing us because I believe that this is our Lord. Maybe the first time he blessed all the things we try and hide or make up for, or the things we insult in ourselves and others wasn't in the beatitudes, maybe it was in his life. Because after all, it was Jesus who had all the powers of the universe at his disposal but who did not consider his equality with God and something to be exploited, but instead came to us in the most vulnerable of ways - as a powerless, flesh and blood newborn. As though to say, you may hate your bodies, but I am blessing all human flesh. You may admire strength and might, but I am blessing all human weakness. You may seek power, but I am blessing all human vulnerability."

"This Jesus whom we follow cried at the tomb of his friend, and turned the other cheek and forgave those who hung him on a cross. He was God's Beatitude - God's blessing to the weak in a world that only admires the

(continued...)

strong. So if you are here tonight mourning, or feeling forsaken, abused, unseen, or no-longer-useful. If you, perhaps like myself, are all too aware that it is not your strength and virtue that qualify you to be called a saint, but your need for a God who makes beautiful things out of dust, then this meal we are about to eat is for you. It is as much for we who believe we have no need for it as it is for we who believe we are not worthy of it. And know that it is not your ability to do for yourself, but your hunger that qualifies you to be fed. For it is a beatitude meal: the broken, blessed and given body of Christ. So as you come, behold who you are. And as the blessings Jesus pronounced on the mount so long ago - know that it is here that you become what you receive."

(Nadia Bolz-Weber: 'Accidental Saints - Finding God in all the wrong people' 2015; Canterbury Press; ISBN 978-1-84825-823-)



6th October 2016 **For Quaker Week, the Religious Society of Friends advertised on *Pink News* in an attempt to reach out and welcome LGBT people. They explain their stance below:**

Quakers welcome lesbian, gay and bisexual, non-binary and transgender people.

We affirm the love of God for all people, whatever their sexuality or gender identity. In 2009 we asked the government to change the law to treat same-sex partnerships in the same way as opposite-sex marriages. Now same-sex Quaker couples may marry in our meeting houses.

On the meaning of marriage, in 2014, writer and Quaker Rosie Bailey wrote for *Pink News*: "As human beings we long to experience love, to find it central in our lives; we want not only to be given love but to give it. Love liberates us from the prison of ourselves. The true measure of an intimate relationship is its degree of selfless love, a love that isn't proprietorial or exploitative, but tender, responsible, committed, equal; a love that feeds its transforming messages of hope and happiness benevolently into society day after day."

Believing that each life is sacred and of unique worth leads Quakers to work in countless ways for a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world. Quakerism is a way of life, rather than a set of beliefs. Quakers seek to experience God directly, with themselves and with the world around them.

The bedrock of the Quaker way is the silent meeting for worship; out of the communal gathered stillness comes the strength to work for peace, equality, simplicity and truth.

Often at the cutting edge of social change, Quakers were the first church in Britain to push for equal marriage and the first to disinvest from fossil fuel extraction.

When conscription was introduced in World War I, Quakers worked with others for the conscience clause. They refused to fight because they refused to kill. They saved lives, instead of taking lives. Quakers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in

The committee thought this important to circulate to all members

From: Dominic Arnall [mailto:dominic.arnall@stonewall.org.uk]

Sent: 05 December 2016 16:48

Subject: New Faith Role Models Programme from Stonewall

We have an exciting opportunity for LGBT people of faith. We'd love to offer you the opportunity to apply for a place on the programme, and we'd also appreciate it if you would share it with your contacts and networks.

The Role Models Programme is one of many empowerment programmes we have at Stonewall. We are striving to take these further and use them as a real force for social change. As part of that work, we are delighted to offer a free Role Models Programme specifically for people of faith.

The Stonewall one-day Role Models Programme gives LGBT people of faith the opportunity to explore what it means to be an LGBT role model and the space to identify how they are going to create an inclusive environment for other LGBT people within their faith communities.

Places are limited but we are using an application process to ensure the widest possible range of diversity on the programme.

We believe in the importance of enabling LGBT people from a diverse range of faiths to take part, especially those that are currently under-represented. Therefore we encourage applications from lesbian, gay, bi and trans people from all faiths. If you would like to apply for a place or have any questions about the programme, please visit <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/get-involved-ind-and-comm/faith-role-models>.

Regards, Dominic Arnall [Head of Programmes]

This communication came in to the committee in the summer. I thought that it would be of interest to members to see the stirrings in the undergrowth....

Message re joining forces with other LGBT Christian groups

From: "Giles Elliott (Male Co-Chair)" <mcochair@eflgc.org.uk>

To: mcochair@eflgc.org.uk

Date: 02 August 2016 at 20:00

Subject: Working together

Dear Friends

We are writing to you as the Steering Group for the Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians (EFLGC). As a Christian LGBT organization we hold a conference every year, usually in October and we would like to invite you work with us to develop a conference in 2017.

Over the last year, as a steering group, we have recognized that we need to refresh our vision for changing needs and aspirations within the LGBT Christian community but we also recognize that so much more could be achieved if the various LGBT Christian organisations could work together sharing resources, pooling talents and avoiding duplicated work. This was one of the themes that came out of the recent Open Church event held at Steve Chalke's Oasis Hub in June this year where we were particularly inspired and challenged by Ruth Hunt, Chief Executive of Stonewall, who highlighted that the LGBT Christian community is fragmented and as a result lacks impact. Thus, we are starting to try and draw together other organisations to see if we could work together and 'gather our voices' to present a shared vision for an inclusive church.

We have written to all of the other organisations below in an effort to get as many as representatives together including:

Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement <http://www.lgcm.org.uk/>

Changing Attitude Coordinator <http://changingattitude.org.uk/> -

Two:23 Network <http://www.two23.net/> - <mailto:hello@two23.net>

Outcome <http://outcomeonline.org.uk/> - Rev Leonora Wassell

rainbowrev94@hotmail.co.uk

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We would very much like to work with you. Please contact us by either emailing contact@eflgc.org.uk or calling 0771 427 8865. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

The EFLGC Steering Group;

Chris Brook; Mike Dark; Giles Elliott; Susan Murphy & Christine Whitney-Cooper

Transgender rabbi is taking on America's hard right over LGBT rights. 9th December 2016

Rabbi Silverstein has confronted far right commentator Ben Shapiro over his comments on trans people. The alt-righter had referred to being trans as a "mental illness" in public comments. Shapiro previously wrote that: "men can't magically become women, and women can't magically become men."

Rabbi Silverstein is now dedicating his work to confronting the bigotry. He wrote: "The Torah teaches that we are all created in God's image. Shapiro failed to extend this teaching to the transgender community or to people with mental illness. What Shapiro misses is that part of living life is about becoming who we are, living into our potential, recognising our gifts and sharing those with the world. For transgender people, the barriers to do so are higher. We often take longer to figure out who we are, how to make it real to ourselves and how to actualise that in our world."



TV newsreader India Willoughby makes a comeback after transitioning to female 3rd October 2016

A report has found that the UK's health service is failing to meet the needs of transgender people, with a lack of training leaving nursing staff unprepared to care for them. 11th October 2016

This comes from the Royal College of Nursing, following on from other damning warnings about the state of trans-specific gender services on the NHS. An RCN survey of more than 1,200 nursing staff has found that many health care staff have been left without skills needed to care for the rising numbers of transgender patients. 78% had not had training on how to care for transgender people, and only 13% of those surveyed said they had felt prepared to meet the needs of trans patients they had cared for. The survey revealed a severe lack of training, with nearly four in five nursing staff having had no training at all in this area, and just 1% saying their pre-registration training covered this subject.

One nurse said: "There appears to be a mismatch between the need for these services and the training given. I think currently there is not enough support and this adds further distress to the experience of this group of patients."

The findings also point to issues in the care of transgender children, with only 14% of nursing staff saying their current service is equipped to meet the needs of children who identify as transgender or non-binary. The RCN is calling on the Government to ensure the care of transgender patients is introduced at all levels of nursing and wider health care education.

Wendy Irwin, RCN Diversity and Equalities Coordinator, said: "Over the past few years, rising awareness of gender fluidity has led to more people coming forward – adults and children alike. Building both competence and confidence in understanding is key to breaking through stigma, but as this survey shows, support through learning and development is urgently required if we are to provide the care and support trans people need."

The RCN recently released updated guidance for clinicians treating trans patients. They said: "The RCN recognises that trans people frequently experience prejudice and discrimination. This resource is designed to help you respond to the needs of patients and clients who identify as transgender. Initially created in response to an RCN Congress resolution, this guidance has been updated following further research from other organisations."



Tory MP demands BBC censor transgender TV shows 31st October 2016

The ultra-conservative MP for Wellingborough, Peter Bone, made the extraordinary claim after the Mail on Sunday ran a misleading story about a kids' TV show.

The CBBC show, Just A Girl, follows 11-year-old Amy on her journey to get hormone control and begin her transition.

The newspaper claimed the show was "sowing the seeds of confusion" into young viewers' minds and encouraging children to get "sex changes" – even though under-18s do not receive hormones or gender surgery in the UK. Teenagers can receive drugs to delay the onset of puberty, but their effects are entirely reversible.

In response to the article Mr Bone, who has been an MP since 2005 and consistently voted against every single LGBT rights measure, called on the broadcaster to censor the show. He said: "It beggars belief that the BBC is making this programme freely available to children as young as six. I entirely share the anger of parents who just want to let children be children. It is completely inappropriate for such material to be on the CBBC website and I shall be writing to BBC bosses to demand they take it down as soon as possible."

Another Conservative MP, Julian Brazier, fumed: "This programme is very disappointing and inappropriate. Children are very impressionable and this is going to confuse and worry them."

ASIA

A trans activist has been shot and is now fighting for her life in Peshawar, Pakistan. She was refused treatment for hours and was 'laughed at' by hospital staff according to friends. 7th January 2016

Lebanon allows trans man to legally change his gender 28th January 2016

The Indian state of Tamil Nadu has appointed the nation's first transgender woman to the police force. 16th February 2016

A transgender man from China has been sacked after a week in a new job because he wore men's clothes. 24th March 2016

Indian designer Sharmila Nair has created a new sari collection inspired by and for India's trans community. 26th May 2016

Vietnam passes law protecting rights of transgender people 25th November 2015

A non-binding fatwa signed by 50 clerics in Pakistan has declared that t-g individuals have the right to marry. 28.6.2016

Ten members of a gang have been arrested in Pakistan for publicly flogging a trans person. 14th November 2016

The Government in West Bengal has asked state-funded colleges to offer separate toilet facilities for trans people. 8.7.16

Model detained at Dubai airport for 'being trans' The "imitation of women by men" remains illegal in the United Arab Emirates, where trans people are not legally recognised 10th August 2016

Despite bans, protests planned in Istanbul after trans woman's body found burned 21st August 2016

Trans man becomes first person to seek gender surgery in United Arab Emirates 21st September 2016

Trans Muslim woman killed days after her wedding A Muslim transgender woman was killed in Russia three days after marrying her husband this week. Raina Aliev was left virtually unrecognisable as her body was hacked into pieces. The incident allegedly took place after Aliev's father, Alimshaikh Aliev, called for his daughter's execution on a Russian TV station and misgendered Raina. "Let him be killed, I don't want to see him," Alimshaikh said. "Bring him here and kill him in front of my eyes". 5th November 2016

This makes Iran look friendly - see PAGE 20

Judge in Ohio denies school district's bid to discriminate against trans girl 28th September 2016

The state of Indiana is refusing to recognise a transgender man's name change, because he's not a US citizen. 16.9.2016

California becomes first state to start trans employment scheme 16th September 2016

Polling this week from Pew Research Center shows that a majority of women support trans people being able to use the restroom of their chosen gender, with 55% in favour and 40% against. 3rd October 2016

Christian group One Million Moms has launched a boycott of H&M after mistaking a Muay Thai fighting champ for a transgender woman. 5th October 2016

Trans teenager Kyler Prescott took his own life after hospital staff continually referred to him as a girl while on suicide watch. 7th October 2016

Massachusetts is being forced to put a transgender rights law up for public vote, after a campaign led by anti-LGBT groups.

The Massachusetts referendum will be held in 2018. 13th October 2016

An anti-LGBT activist who carries a handgun to the bathroom to ward off transgender women is not fussed about allegations that Donald Trump sexually assaulted women. 24th October 2016

The chair of Trump's campaign in Texas is pushing an anti-transgender 'Women's Privacy Act', ironically claiming that trans people are a sexual assault risk. 24.10. 2016

Internet troll Milo Yiannopoulos is courting controversy yet again, by spreading his hate-filled anti-trans rhetoric across the United States. 31st October 2016

A Native-American transgender teenager has been voted prom queen at her high school in Spring Lake, North Carolina, home of the 'bathroom bill'. 31st October 2016

US lawyers have begun using Twitter to offer trans people free help with ID and name changes before Trump takes power in 2017. 10th November 2016

More than 100 U.S.military personnel seek to transition in first months of new trans policy 11th Nov 2016

When trans woman Amber Timmons went out to her car on Wednesday morning, she was shocked to find it had been spray-painted with messages such as: "fag", "die he she", a swastika and support for Donald Trump. 17th November 2016

Marine Aaron Wixson has become one of the first to come out as transgender under the military's new policy. 20.11.2016

A 17-year-old trans teenager is being sued by her mother for seeking to transition without her consent. 18.11.2016

The Governor of Kentucky has said there's no need to pass an anti-trans bathroom law. This marks an apparent turn-around from his previous position. 9th December 2016

Compare the history of the situation of transsexual people in Iran

In 1963, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wrote a book in which he stated that there was no religious restriction on corrective surgery for intersex individuals, though this did not apply to those without physical ambiguity in sex organs. At the time Khomeini was a radical, anti-Shah revolutionary and his fatwas did not carry any weight with the Imperial government, which did not have any specific policies regarding transsexual individuals, classing them with gays and lesbians, who faced the punishment of lashing or even death under Iran's penal code

One of Ayatollah Khomeini's first acts on coming to power was to confirm the death penalty for homosexuals: a punishment that has been ruthlessly imposed ever since. Unsurprisingly then, more than a few people were taken aback when, in 1987 he declared a fatwa declaring that gender re-assignment surgery was permissible for "diagnosed" transsexuals. Up until that time, in the sexually fascistic regime of the Ayatollah, trans people were treated exactly the same way as homosexuals. But the change of heart was prompted by the persistence of a trans woman – known originally by her male name of Fereydoon – who, in 1983, braved the thuggery of Khomeini's security guards to present her case to him in person.

Maryam Hatoon Molkara had longed to become physically female but wanted religious authorization. In 1975, she began to write letters to Khomeini, who was then in exile. After the revolution, she was fired, forcibly injected with male hormones, and institutionalized, but she was later released with help from her connections. In 1983, turning up at the Ayatollah's compound in a man's suit, with breasts tightly strapped down and carrying a copy of the Qu'ran, 'Fereydoon' approached the building. She was jumped on viciously by the guards and it was only the intervention of Khomeini's brother that stopped the beating. As Fereydoon hurriedly tried to explain her situation the guards noticed she had something strapped to her chest. Fearing that it was explosives they insisted she removed the bandages. It was the defining moment: as 'Fereydoon's' breasts were exposed the women in the house rushed to cover them with a chador. Such was the confusion generated by the incident the various minions had no choice but to seek the input of the Ayatollah. Incredibly, given the savagery meted out to homosexuals, Khomeini angrily berated those who had assaulted 'Fereydoon'. He later gave her a letter addressed to the chief prosecutor and the head of medical ethics giving religious authorisation for her to have the surgery, which she did in 1997.

Due to this fatwa, issued in 1987, transsexual women in Iran have been able to live as women until they can afford surgery, have surgical reassignment, have their birth certificates and all official documents issued to them in their new gender, and get married to men. However, there is still a great deal of stigma attached to the idea of transsexualism and gender reassignment in ordinary Iranian society, and most transsexuals, after completing their transition, are advised to maintain discretion about their past. Once a transsexual individual has undergone sex reassignment, that person legally becomes the new sex. All legal documents, such as birth certificates and passports, are also changed accordingly.

Currently, it is not possible for presumed transsexual individuals to choose *not* to undergo surgery. Those who wish to remain "non-operative" are likely to face harassment as being homosexuals and subject to the same laws barring homosexual acts.