



SIBYLS NEWS



Issue no. 79 March 2017

Lent and Easter 2017

Dear Reader,

These are troubling times for the whole world, but we in the trans community are facing an even more uncertain future than most. This has been borne in on me more strongly every day, as I sift the world news on behalf of the Sibyls newsletter. There is less inhibition of transphobic behaviour, and a rise in hate crime. There is still no relaxation in the hostile, ill-informed attitude of some religious factions.

As a consequence, I thought that this edition should predominantly draw attention to the positive and heart-warming news which is *also* out there. This extended editorial has claimed the front page. The usual contents list is on the back page. Please keep your material coming!

The news which perhaps touches us most nearly, because of the number of Anglicans within Sibyls, is the **recent report by the House of Bishops** which essentially maintained the pre-existing non-accepting stance with regard to transsexuality. That this report was (narrowly) rejected by the House of Clergy was a small relief, but we should set against that relief (a) the failure of the report compilers to take any cognizance of trans people's own testimony and (b) the fact that the other two Houses of the Synod, the Bishops and the Laity, *accepted* the report. I find that deeply troubling, on a humane level. This edition gives a chronological account of the affair and its aftermath, as seen through the eyes of Tina. There is also a link to the substantial work which has been published online by Susan.

The U.S.A. is of course where the most extreme manifestations of ignorance, bigotry, malevolence and stupidity can currently be found. I still have faith that the wonderful people who form the generous-hearted majority of the U.S. population will in time overcome this tide of error, but it is going to be an extremely rough ride. [Meanwhile, may the Lord have mercy on any black transwoman in the U.S.A. The murder rate they are suffering is horrific.] The flames of ever more virulent prejudice are being fanned by politicians who have no sense of responsibility for the lives of ordinary people, no honour, no compassion, no integrity. The capacity for evil that has rooted itself within what calls itself Christianity in some congregations is attractive to hypocritical populists, who embrace and encourage it for their own benefit. We should pray for these self-proclaimed Christians that they will hear the love of God speaking within their hearts, and reject the politics of hate and fear.

You can read a full account of a recent speech by a former 'hater' from the **Westboro Baptist Church**, who was won round by loving reactions from the targets of their hatred. I make no apology that this is more directly relevant to the gay community than to the trans, nor for the fact that it originates in the U.S.A.—the principle is transferable.

There have already been too many references to the 'restroom issue' in past newsletters, so those stories are not taking headline position in this edition. [Sadly, such matters do make the salacious headlines only too easily.] This newsletter gives instead evidence of the pushback against the systematic attack on tolerance, and of the **wider acceptance across the world** which trans people are being accorded.

I simply could not resist this cartoon, even if it does breach the 'enough on restrooms already' principle. Carol [carol.nixon2012@btinternet.com]



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 maybe 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, except confidentiality. Your details are held in total confidence and will not be given to any other members without your permission.

To contact us in confidence, either write to us or send us an email. enquiries@sibyls.co.uk

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 upercase and lowercase as indicated)

Forthcoming Sibyls events:

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

You may be aware that Tina Beardsley and Chris Dowd are working on a Pastoral Care Manual. Tina is also contributing to another work which is getting underway, using the crowd-funding publishing website 'Unbound', on a history of trans experience in the U.K. 'Trans: A British History' (ed. Christine Burns) has found 436 backers and is 104% funded. It reached the funding target at 9.24am Sun 5th March, following a very generous pledge from Stonewall co-founder and peer of the realm Lord Michael Cashman CBE. That means that Unbound will now work with Christine to publish the book. She says it's a fantastic achievement in just under 40 days, and it's a great motivation for the 25 carefully chosen contributors. Because of the complex process of editing the 25 contributions, design and production, the book won't be ready until early next year. The intention is to try and be ready before the beginning of LGBT History Month in February 2018.

prayer & fasting

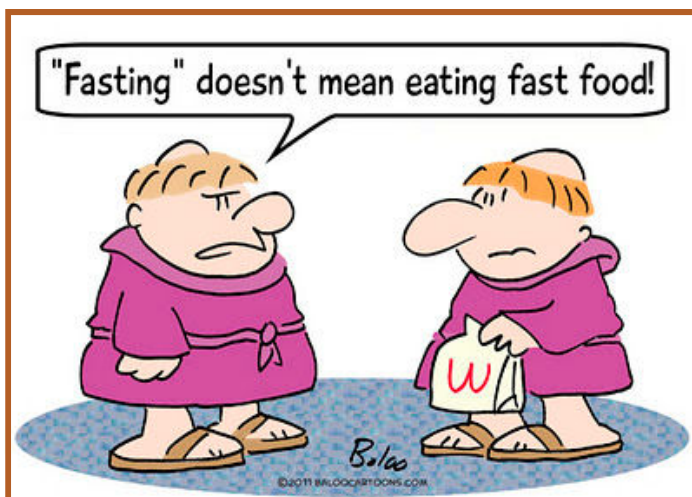


The season of Lent developed very early in Christian history as a period of preparatory fasting. People would refrain from certain meals and the eating of meat and cheese. They would often stick to a diet of raw fruits and vegetables throughout the 40- day season. This practice was seen as a way of uniting with the sacrificial life that God had demonstrated in Jesus Christ (*Canons of Hippolytus*, 20). Today many of us carry on this tradition during Lent. We give up things—usually a food item or another practice—that we enjoy in order to unite more deeply with the love of God.

Some clergy try to make the 'deprivations' of Lent seem less punishing for their modern, rather spoiled audience, by emphasising that Lent is a time for doing new things, striving to achieve those spiritual and moral improvements which are close but not quite within grasp. Making it positive instead of negative. That is surely wise as a general strategy, but perhaps it can actually diminish the importance of Lent, by making it seem too easy.



Christ's discipline is required also of us.



Feeling hungry?



SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

NEXT MEETING: **13 APRIL 2017**

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 13 April, 8 June, 10 August, 12 October, 14 December 2017

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

Calling all Trans people in the UK

I'm conducting a study into 'Trans Identities and Memorialisation' and would love to hear your views!

<https://hull.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/trans-identities-and-memorialisation>

The survey, the first of its kind, explores attitudes towards death and experiences of bereavement within the trans community and forms part of the case study, 'Who Were They: Trans Identities and Memorialisation', which looks at the ways in which trans people are remembered and commemorated after they have died. It is open to anyone who identifies as Trans* who is over 18 years of age and living in the UK. The survey takes around 15-20 minutes to complete.

The research is being conducted by me - Dr Louis Bailey – a trans advocate and a research fellow at the University of Hull. The survey feeds into the 'Remember Me: The Changing Face of Memorialisation' project (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, AHRC).

For more information about the 'Remember Me' study, please go to <http://www2.hull.ac.uk/fass/remember-me.aspx>

Many thanks in advance for your time,

Dr Louis Bailey Research Fellow, 'Remember Me: The Changing Face of Memorialisation', School of Environmental Sciences, University of Hull Louis.Bailey@hull.ac.uk

A few days before Christmas, Sibyls member Josephine wrote from Australia enclosing this poem of comfort she had written for her friend Sophia, who is also on the journey of transition.

For Sophia (Wisdom), my friend, in your pain-love birthing among us again

Eternally present but born in this particular moment,
Shaped by human love and worldly forms,
Made holy and making holy in your courage, care and beauty,
Shine like the star above you.

More lasting than the heavens yet battered by earth's limitations,
Pulled and pushed by others hopes and fears,
Taking on our shared poverty, shame and humiliations,
Shine with the light within you.

Crossing old boundaries and creating new ways and perspectives,
Radiant transforming source of light,
Spreading wisdom and compassion and making us whole and free,
Shine out your new life for all.





The Sibyls reverses Brexit - Really?

Breaking news from Elaine Sommers



Are you getting tired of all the Brexit talk going around? I am, so it makes a refreshing change to be able to tell you about an item of news about Sibyls - we

are planning to go *into* Europe! Yes, the Sibyls is applying to become a member group of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups. Your committee has been considering this possibility for some time, and has just agreed that it would be a positive step to become part of this Europe-wide network, made up of nearly 50 groups from over 20 countries, reaching from Spain in the West to Russia in the East.

I have been involved in the Forum for the last two years, having been impressed by the way the organisation links together large groups and small, and cooperates with larger international bodies, such as the Council of Europe, with the aim of bringing about greater acceptance of LGBT people in church communities throughout the European continent. I was rather taken aback when a year ago it was suggested that I should stand for co-president, and was even more surprised when I was formally elected at the annual conference last May. I was thrown in at the deep end, having to mug up on all the different tasks the Board has to do, including attending board meetings and seminars in countries I've never been to, and some I can't place on the map, and having to get to grips with finances and grant applications for proposed projects. The learning curve has been steep.

One of the things I noticed about the Forum was how few trans people there were. As far as I am aware there are currently no trans member groups, but this makes it all the more significant that Sibyls is keen to get involved at this time. I have heard stories from trans people, particularly in Eastern European, which show that acceptance in the Church is far more difficult in some countries than our own experience in the UK. Conversely, there are other places which are ahead of us. It is important that we share each others' burdens, support and encourage each other, and cooperate across national borders.

The Forum has a Trans Working Group which is currently planning for the annual conference in May (see below for details). There will be a trans pre-conference, led jointly by Sibyls' member Tina Beardsley and myself, plus three trans-related workshops in the main conference programme. And it is at the conference that our membership application will be considered.

Before all that, we will be conducting a survey of all member groups, to see what involvement they have with trans people, and what are their attitudes to possible future involvement.

I will end with an invitation to everyone to consider joining Tina and myself in Gdansk, Poland for our annual conference, which takes place from 24th to 28th May. You can find full details at:

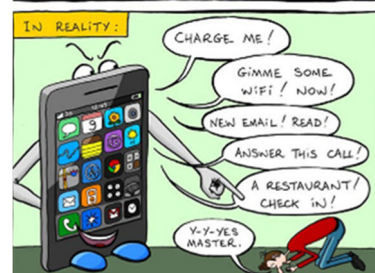
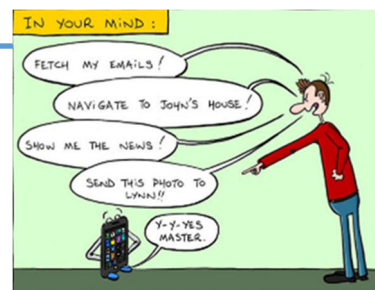
<http://www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu>



The conference title is 'Forwards in Solidarity', a reflection of the history of the city where Lech Walesa led the Solidarity movement in the 1980s. Some of our meetings will actually take place in the imposing European Solidarity Centre, located just outside the famous dockyard gates.

If you want to ask me more about the conference, or about the Forum in general, you can contact me at elainesommers007@yahoo.co.uk

The Smartphone and Homo Sapiens



**THE SIBYLS
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT**

YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2016

	2016	2015 £
Weekends / Days away *		
Receipts from members	4,155.00	120.00
Paid to House or for expenses	3,880.75	-
Surplus / (Deficit)	274.25	-
Advance bookings	-	-
Donations		
Donations to Sibyls	152.00	68.32
Donations from Sibyls - from surplus **	- 200.00	-
Newsletter costs		
Duplication, envelopes and postage	-	28.94
Other costs		
British Monomarks box number ***	-	65.80
IT students visit to Sibyls committee meeting	-	106.40
Donation for hire of room - committee meeting	- 30.00	-
Domain Renewal	-	8.38
Use of group funds for members to attend meetings	- 80.00	-
CASH SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	116.25	- 141.20 deficit
Opening balance at HSBC Bank	1327.84	1,469.04
Closing balance at HSBC Bank ****	1444.09	1,327.84
check	0.00	0.00

* Not all moneys go through the Sibyls bank account as different organisers have different approaches

** There was a large surplus from the Hilfield weekend and the committee decided to donate £200 to the Franciscans.

*** The British Monomarks box number is closed.

**** 5 cheques amounting to £435 have not been cashed yet. I have accrued these in the accounts as 'spent money' and am making enquiries

It's a (Church of England) lock out from the blog by Tina Beardsley, January 28th, 2017 (i.e. before the Synod vote)

'In keeping with its stance on Equal Marriage, the House of Bishops' Report (GS 2055) *Marriage and Same Sex relationships after the Shared Conversations* locks in the Church of England to its existing policy with little prospect of change. Effectively this document is 'a lock out', and a cruel slap in the face for LGBTI people who have waited patiently and respectfully for the Church of England to hear their stories and to respond pastorally and affirmatively. Those who have had enough of this kind of abuse, clergy and laity, will now want to walk away, but that will not be easy. LGBTI clergy and some lay members too are locked into the national institution as their employer, but at the same time an important aspect of their lives is being locked out of the church's worship and community.

What the Bishops seem to want is a return to the awkward and harmful division between the public and the private realm that kept LGBTI people firmly in the closet as far as their loving was concerned. Those who have come out and thrown away the key are never going to return to the closet, but even the most integrated LGBTI Christian will feel under pressure to return to conflicted patterns of living, because it is bishops who are saying these kind of things, and the bishops, as they keep reminding us, are the leaders in this church. But they are also employers, and what they outline here appears designed to exclude people, including their employees, who do not conform to an ideal of heterosexual marriage that has become the current shibboleth. An ideal of lifelong marriage, which as others have noted, is not actually lived out by some of the people making this demand of others.

The reason they are able to do this, and why this document is so circuitous in its argument, is that, without reference to General Synod, the House of Bishops obtained exemption from the provisions of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 in the form of the quadruple lock, which prevents the clergy from acting in conscience and marrying a couple of the same sex. This is the 'key' to the current impasse, and until these locks are removed the Church of England will remain in lock down as far as LGBTI people are concerned. So secure are these exemptions that there is not even the opportunity to pick the lock as there was in the case of remarriage after divorce.

Only yesterday the *Church Times* published an obituary of Archdeacon Tim Raphael, who when incumbent of St John's Wood 'made himself unpopular with the next Bishop, Gerald Ellison, not only by remarrying divorcees, but also for promoting the practice in a letter to *The Times*.' This was in the late 1970s/early 1980s, when my training incumbent, the late Canon Bill Sargent, a good Prayer Book Catholic, did the same. Their determination to put conscience before canon law was part of the groundswell that led to the amendment of the Canons, so that today members of the House of Bishops too can remarry after divorce. Learning, perhaps, from what happened in that case, the Bishops and their advisers made sure that clergy today are well and truly locked out of performing a same sex marriage. It would be unwise to try and pick the quadruple locks. The only remedy is to work to remove them and set the people free.

When one reads current Church of England reports one enters a world in which a tight but oddly interlocking logic operates. Of course, no one is going to want to say that they disagree with our Lord's teaching, as expressed in Canon Law, that marriage is between a man and a woman. But to affirm that marriage is also between a same sex/gender couple does not entail contradiction of the teaching that marriage is between a man and a woman – this was the fallacy about marriage being 'hollowed out' (how I detested that phrase) by equal marriage and that was used to justify the quadruple locks. No, marriage is between a man and a woman AND it can be between a man and a man and a woman and a woman.

If the Bishops object to the idea of same sex marriage so much that they are not prepared to countenance it in Church of England churches, or allow clergy to pray with the newly married, or imply that they are likely to make it even more difficult for clergy to do so, then I think they need to say why they think these choices are so unacceptable. It really is not good enough to hide behind the Canons, especially when other churches within the Communion have modelled the possibility of change: the Episcopal Church in the USA for example. What's more, when the Episcopal Church produced its teaching document on marriage, LGT people helped to write it.

<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/12485.pdf>

It's time that we ended the paternalism that has wrecked the Church of England's exploration of 'human sexuality', the locking out of clergy and laity from the really important conversations about what marriage is and what should happen next. Yes, the US Task Force on Marriage included someone who is trans, but in keeping with its thoroughly retrograde outlook the Bishop's document has even returned to bisexual, trans and intersex invisibility. Waiting in the wings though is the Blackburn motion, which should have been discussed at this February's session of General Synod, and which advocates the welcome of trans people and the authorisation of appropriate prayers and liturgies to mark transition. I do hope, when this motion is finally brought forward, that it is not deflected into the kind of self-cancelling 'options' that are outlined for liturgies for same sex couples in the Annex to this Report.

In any case, when it comes to praying for a couple, there must be wiggle room and an opportunity to pick the locks on the shackles of prejudice that dares to suggest, in a document following on from the Shared Conversations, that such prayers would not 'edify the people' (Annex 9, page 18). Anglo-Catholic priests went to prison for their beliefs. Tim Raphael and Bill Sargent defied their bishops and the Canons when they followed their consciences and remarried the divorced. It is time for those who support the full inclusion of LGBTI people to demonstrate it now. This is our time and our day and we must neither weaken nor fail.

The bishops are our leaders, but in the kingdom of God a little child can lead us. In terms of the inclusion of LGBTI people the younger generation it seems are leading the way. 'Tues Petrus ... et tibi dabo claves regni coelorum'. The bishops do seem to hold all the keys, but in the kingdom of God so do we all; keys that can bind or loose. And it's high time that we set God's LGBTI people free.'

A view from the gallery Christina Beardsley, February 24th, 2017

When I was a vicar of two parishes it was said by some PPC members that they did not find the deliberations of the General Synod especially helpful, and were, in the main, irrelevant to daily life in the parish. I tended to agree with them, and nor had I any inclination to stand for General Synod myself, for various reasons. I have listened to Synod debates on live stream, and of course, watched the historic debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood on television in 1992, but in nearly 40 years of ministry in the Church of England I have never before sat in the public gallery at Church House when Synod was sitting, until that is last Wednesday, when GS 2055, the House of Bishops Report 'Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations', was under discussion.

In the morning I caught the end of Bishop Graham James's presentation and then returned in the afternoon for the extended debate and the vote itself, the outcome of which was that the Synod did not 'Take Note' of the Bishops' Report, the proposal to do so being defeated by just 7 votes in the House of Clergy. (It was passed in the House of Bishops and the House of Laity but needed to be agreed by all three Houses for the Synod to Take Note).

I had experienced a mounting tension as the day wore on. The outcry against the Bishops' Report had been unprecedented and several retired bishops had weighed in with a letter that criticised their successors, not least for speaking about the pain of lesbian and gay people without including their actual voices. For those organisations and individuals for whom this is a justice and equality issue, both the content of the Report and the manner in which it was expressed were deeply flawed. Page after page outlined how no change could be made to the Church's teaching, and that even the blessings of same-sex couples was envisaged as problematic, but that a change of tone was needed, and what was vaguely described as 'maximum freedom' within those constraints. Conservatives, on the other hand, were equally unhappy, in their case with what they saw as the dangerous loophole presented by the prospect of maximum freedom, and some of them would also vote not to Take Note for that reason.

In the days leading up to the debate the two, or more accurately, the various sides rehearsed their arguments on the radio and television and in the press. For the Bishops – who remained united (there was a single miscast vote and one abstention) – as well as for conservatives and for those in favour of full inclusion this was becoming a line in the sand moment and the anxiety and stress were palpable. Finally, the public gallery filled, members entered the Chamber, and the debate began, and what a debate, one of the finest I have heard in Synod. Many people had been and were praying, of course, including members of the youthful Community of St Anselm, who were around throughout the day and holding the whole Synod in prayer, and that must have helped. I am also assuming that the quality of debate, especially its frankness and relational character, owed much to the ethos of the Shared Conversations, flawed though some people found them to be.

It would not be appropriate to single out particular speeches for comment as they were, almost without exception, excellent and are available online.

<https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england/wednesday-15-february-marriage-and-same-sex-relationships-after-the-shared-conversations>

What I took away was that the issue of variant sexuality affects lay people as well as clergy, including the partners of clergy; that negativity towards people who are LGBTI+ can drive them to suicide; that some same sex couples are parents; that people who are black or disabled encounter similar problems in congregations and church culture to those experienced by LGBTI+ people; that some congregations (including older rural congregations) want the Church to model Jesus' compassion in its interactions with LGBTI+ people, who include family members, colleagues and friends; and that there is a divide, a huge divide, between those who see LGBTI+ Christians as a problem, an issue, or sinful, rather than as brothers and sisters and members of the same Christian family. None of this stuff is easy to say or comfortable to hear but the atmosphere was one of respectful listening, and one hoped that Synod and the wider Church would be able to walk together, even though the limits of Christian love are being tested at the moment in several different directions

It must have taken courage to vote not to Take Note, whatever the reason, as no one wants to go against their bishop, the House of Bishops, or our Archbishops. For LGBTI+ Christians and their allies, however, this debate and the Report that led to it was a step too far, after several years of waiting for the Pilling Working Party to do its work, followed by the cumbersome process of the Shared Conversations. Having long suspected that they were being subjected to delaying tactics, they were also unhappy with the case studies chosen for the group work, which once again appeared to objectify gay and lesbian people (there was nothing about bisexual, transgender and intersex people in the Report) as a problem for the Church, rather than a gift, and some Synod representatives absented themselves from that session.

The Synod protocol is that the outcome of votes is announced in silence and without applause, but there was great relief in the public gallery where I was sitting when it was declared that General Synod had decided not to Take Note of a Report that had once again been written 'about' rather than with the people directly affected. The swift response of the Archbishops, which stresses that no one is an issue or a problem, but rather made in God's image, called and loved by Christ, is much to be welcomed, as is their promise of a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church. Their words seem a direct response to the pleas I heard in General Synod last week and I hope and pray that they will be turned into action in the days ahead.





THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

16 February 2017

Following the vote in General Synod not to take note of the paper on Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations (GS 2055) we are writing to set out the way forward in the next few months.

First, we want to be clear about some underlying principles. In these discussions no person is a problem, or an issue. People are made in the image of God. All of us, without exception, are loved and called in Christ. There are no 'problems', there are simply people called to redeemed humanity in Christ.

How we deal with the real and profound disagreement - put so passionately and so clearly by many at the debate - is the challenge we face as people who all belong to Christ. To deal with that disagreement and to find ways forward, we need a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church. This must be founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it; it must be based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual. We need to work together - not just the bishops but the whole Church, not excluding anyone - to move forward with confidence.

The way forward needs to be about love, joy and celebration of our common humanity; of our creation in the image of God, of our belonging to Christ - all of us, without exception, without exclusion. Nevertheless while the principles are straightforward, putting them into practice, as we all know, is not, given the deep disagreements among us. We are therefore asking first for every Diocesan Bishop to meet with their General Synod members for an extended conversation in order to establish clearly the desires of every member of Synod for the way forward.

As Archbishops we will be establishing a Pastoral Oversight group led by the Bishop of Newcastle, with the task of supporting and advising Dioceses on pastoral actions with regard to our current pastoral approach to human sexuality. The group will be inclusive, and will seek to discern the development of pastoral practices, within current arrangements.

Secondly, we, with others, will be formulating proposals for the May House of Bishops for a large scale teaching document around the subject of human sexuality. In an episcopal church a principal responsibility of Bishops is the teaching ministry of the church, and the guarding of the deposit of faith that we have all inherited. The teaching document must thus ultimately come from the Bishops.

However, all episcopal ministry must be exercised with all the people of God, lay and ordained, and thus our proposals will ensure a wide ranging and fully inclusive approach, both in subject matter and in those who work on it.

We will also be suggesting to the Business Committee a debate in general terms on the issues of marriage and human sexuality. We wish to give the General Synod an opportunity to consider together those things we do affirm.

In the meantime, we commend to your prayers our common concern for every member of this church, of all views, and most especially our concern for the mission of God to which we are called by the Father, for which we are made ready by the Son, and in which we are equipped by the Holy Spirit.

+ Justin Cantuar:

+Sentamu Eboracensis

14th March Tina's response to the Archbishops' letter

The letter announces the appointment of the Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman, as chair of the Pastoral Oversight Group on sexuality which the Archbishops are setting up. Tina's response to that has been to send her a complimentary copy of 'This is My Body' with a letter in which she points out :

"One of my many concerns about the recent Report from the House of Bishops, which was not taken note of by General Synod, is that it included no reference to transgender people, even though transgender people had participated in the Shared Conversations. Indeed, last week's debate replaced a previously scheduled debate on the Blackburn Diocesan Synod motion about improving the Church's welcome for trans people and the provision of suitable naming ceremonies and transition prayers, which was postponed for an astonishing two years.

"The Bishop of Norwich is on record as saying that the perspectives of the various identities of LGBTI+ people pose different challenges to the Church's theology. In fact, as our book demonstrates, transgender people, just like other Christians, are often engaged in articulating theology. While these constituencies do indeed have different concerns and needs, LGBTI+ Christians face many common and overlapping problems of exclusion, and numbers being relatively small find it helpful to work in alliance. Of course sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct, but they also interface, as we have seen from the House of Bishops' insistence that marriage is between a man and a woman.

"I would therefore ask that the pastoral and liturgical needs of transgender people are also addressed as part of the forthcoming work to promote 'a radical new Christian inclusion' in the Church of England, and am prepared to assist with that if appropriate. I am currently working on a transgender pastoral care manual with the Revd Dr Chris Dowd, a URC minister, who conducted research into the spirituality of twelve transgender people. In the book we note that negative church responses have silenced the voices of transgender people, obscuring and denying the truth inherent in their stories. Yet when they are allowed to tell their stories of joy and struggle we hear of their faith and resilience, and how faith in God saved them when all else was falling apart. Our book is due out next year."

Further reading: Susan's scholarly response to the Church, issued 17 Feb 2017, can read online at:

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/229P-WhatNext.pdf>

17th March The Bishop of Chelmsford Stephen Cottrell gives his backing to a formal ceremony for same-sex couples.

He said: "The Archbishops' phrase 'a radical new Christian inclusion' needs some unpacking. It will be in doing this that we find ways forward that both preserve the unity of the church, respect the conscientious disagreement of those who are opposed to any change, and begin to give a greater welcome to gay and lesbian people. Let me plain: LGBTI+ people are welcome in the churches of the Chelmsford diocese. They are welcome and we want to listen to them and work with them so as to find appropriate ways of expressing their love – for it is not good for human beings to be alone – in permanent, faithful, stable relationships. At the moment there is no consensus in the Church of England for those relationships to be formally blessed in Church, or for the Church of England to embrace same-sex marriage, but the current arrangements do welcome lay people and clergy into civil partnerships and there is no reason why prayers of thanksgiving for these relationships – perhaps a Eucharist – cannot be offered. We do not want same-sex couples to be cut off from the Church, and we want those who come to us seeking God's blessing for their love to receive the guidance, challenge and support of the Church. We need to find ways of living with this diversity, not being torn apart by it. This will, I know, be hard for some people to hear. Some think even this a step too far; and others think it nowhere near far enough. But I hope and pray that even these small steps will make a difference, for the pastoral and missiological implications of this issue, especially with young people, mean that we must do something, and that we cannot simply wait till there is complete ecumenical and Anglican Communion agreement before doing anything."

[This has not gone down well with ultra-conservative group 'Anglican Mainstream', who oppose acceptance of LGBT people in the Church. They wrote that Archbishops appear to have "given a green light for Diocesan Bishops to publicly express a preference for abandonment of more than 3000 years of Judaeo-Christian anthropology and sexual ethics". The group also appeared to call for Bishop Stephen's head, saying: "It is difficult to see how his role as guardian of a distinctive, counter-cultural apostolic truth has not been forfeited. He is sending a message to those holding to the traditional position, that while he apparently respects their position, they will not be allowed to block change any more. The implication is that if progress is not made towards celebrating same sex relationships in church, it is the conservatives who are not 'listening', and they are the ones responsible for continued conflict by not being willing to live with diversity. It is now over to the orthodox clergy and laity in Chelmsford Diocese, first, to see what they will do. Some will be talking about looking for some form of differentiation, perhaps alternative oversight, whether informal or more visible. Some, especially laity, will be looking for another denomination. We hope that those who continue to recognize the Bishop's spiritual authority ... will see the need to join others in taking principled action. This pattern will be repeated in other Dioceses in coming months."]

“Compare and contrast!” [A message of inclusive love in this personal story from Yvonne Wood]

I came out to my worship group

I have been going to my Quaker meeting for worship since the 80s, in my 30s, before and during my gender identity journey. I started from a base of innocence and morality born from a Methodist upbringing. I learned about myself, I unlearned assumptions about maleness and about God.

My worship group knew me as a man and they saw my family grow. While I went there, my partner and I went through a private struggle with what my behaviour meant and where it was going. My partner felt less happy about meeting friends while pretending everything was fine, including our Quaker friends.

But she also helped me face up to myself and accept my truth. We talked about the need for people in my worship group to know, to be true, and to be upheld. Who should be told, when and how? I told a few individuals one by one, starting with the pastoral team that I was part of. The group always started meetings by sharing ‘*how are we?*’ I could not keep avoiding the central issue of my life.

Meanwhile, I was developing my involvement with the national Quaker LGBT group and I found myself speaking openly to other Quakers in a way I simply could not unlock at my own meeting. This meant I had two identities within Quakers, while feeling increasingly clear and unambiguous as an individual. For a long time then, in my worship group, a few people knew I was transgender, but only three had met Yvonne.

Quakers always counted up its members under male and female. In 2015, Friends House changed this to male, female and other. I asked to be counted as other. In our east London and Essex area, there were two ‘others’. Following on from publicity about this, a Friend proposed that our worship meeting make a statement welcoming transgender and non-binary people. I knew that when this came onto the agenda for our business meeting, I would at last have the opportunity to say something. I told the fifteen Friends there that I am transgender. I told of how the Quaker meeting had provided a grounding for my own coming to terms. When people encounter a self-knowledge that is essentially spiritual and want the support of their faith group, the faith group often rejects them.

This business meeting led to other gatherings that enabled me to come out to more. I took part in the small group of six that drafted the statement for discussion, and I was then able to speak to people I know about gender diversity - as a general topic and as a personal experience.

In my own Quaker worship group, we organised an ‘exploration’ after Meeting for Worship. It had taken years to get here, but I had been led to this time, when I could tell Friends that I am transgender, that conviction about my female self went hand in hand with conviction of my Quaker faith and practice. I told them that I have another name and appearance. Afterwards I couldn’t quite believe what I had said, how matter-of-fact I was. But it is a matter of fact - by telling others I experienced a confirmation.

It was of course all about what Quakers can offer, based on our testimonies of integrity, simplicity, equality. No one has to reveal anything about their private and personal lives, all are accepted, all can offer ministry. We were not giving precedence to transgender, but improving knowledge, making what is often hidden more visible, appreciating positive changes in society while being aware of some deep-seated discrimination. More gender variant individuals might find Quaker worship right for them and worship groups can be sensitive to visibility, invisibility, names and pronouns, open to the person.

Over the months and years, there were two Friends who had put some trust in me, whose response I had been most nervous about. Both were there. Mary came up immediately afterwards, beaming, hugging. A week later she took me for dinner and understood more through our conversation. A few weeks after the event, Pat told me she was clearing her two wardrobes and laughed, ‘I suppose you have two wardrobes!’ She apologized for making a joke, but I was delighted because it had all registered, it affirmed.

The conversation with Mary was important for appreciating how people hear and either miss the point or make sense of gender diversity. She said that two years ago when I had alluded to my gender, she thought I was trying to say I was gay. She said ‘I am very masculine, so what makes someone trans?’ She had great difficulty understanding it had nothing to do with sexuality. “What is it then?” After being most hesitant, I was now most open. Our conversation taught me more about how to celebrate myself, and find the loving, prayerful support of others, and not always the others I expect.

Statement from North East Thames Area Meeting (*North East Thames Area Meeting held 18. Feb 2017*)

‘Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age. All are heard, valued and supported both in our needs and our leadings. Everyone’s contribution is accepted according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included.’

Our faith in the future (Quakers in Britain, 2015) <http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/our-faith-in-the-future>

Quakers in North East Thames Area Meeting are aware that our community is a continuing creation in which we seek to know and love ourselves and one another in all our differences, united at a profound level in our efforts to reach and respond to others in the things that are eternal.

We want our Local Meetings to be safe places where each person can come as their own true self and find a spiritual home.

We recognise that there is a growing awareness in society, and in the Society of Friends, that the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’ prove incomplete when describing the diversity of gender identity and experience that exists.

We hope that we can all grow together in our understanding of gender identity.

We want it to be known that our Area Meeting is a place where all are welcomed and nurtured, including people who are transgender and non-binary.

We hope that we can share a spiritual companionship, creating a place where we can all listen to and connect with one another, and accompany one another with love.



A former member of the Westboro Baptist Church on leaving the notorious hate group, and slowly coming to understanding . 7th March 2017

The church, based in Topeka, Kansas, is notorious for its opposition to “fags” and “fag-enablers”, picketing anything even vaguely related to LGBT equality as part of its quest to spread a message of hatred. The church’s website is <http://www.godhatesfags.com/>

Megan Phelps-Roper, the daughter of the notorious hate church’s unofficial spokeswoman Shirley Phelps-Roper, was brought up to follow the church’s horrific teachings – but left the Kansas-based cult in 2012. The young former church member spoke out about her experience in a moving TED talk, released 7th March. https://www.ted.com/talks/megan_phelps_roper_i_grew_up_in_the_westboro_baptist_church_here_s_why_i_left

In her talk, Ms Phelps-Roper explained that interacting with opponents of the Church on Twitter were key in helping her overcome her beliefs.

She said: “Initially, the people I encountered on the platform were just as hostile as I expected... but in the midst of that digital brawl, a strange pattern developed. Someone would arrive at my profile with the usual rage and scorn, and I would respond with a custom mix of Bible verses, pop culture references and smiley faces.

“They would be understandably confused and caught off guard, but then a conversation would ensue. And it was civil — full of genuine curiosity on both sides. How had the other come to such outrageous conclusions about the world? Sometimes the conversation even bled into real life. People I’d sparred with on Twitter would come out to the picket line to see me when I protested in their city. A man named David was one such person. He ran a blog called Jewlicious, and after several months of heated but friendly arguments online, he came out to see me at a picket in New Orleans. He brought me a Middle Eastern dessert from Jerusalem, where he lives, and I brought him kosher chocolate and held a God hates Jews sign. There was no confusion about our positions, but the line between friend and foe was becoming blurred. We’d started to see each other as human beings, and it changed the way we spoke to one another.

“It took time, but eventually these conversations planted seeds of doubt in me. My friends on Twitter took the time to understand Westboro’s doctrines, and in doing so, they were able to find inconsistencies I’d missed my entire life. Why did we advocate the death penalty for gays when Jesus said, ‘Let he who is without sin cast the first stone?’ How could we claim to love our neighbour while at the same time praying for God to destroy them? The truth is that the care shown to me by these strangers on the internet was itself a contradiction. It was growing evidence that people on the other side were not the demons I’d been led to believe.

“These realizations were life-altering. Once I saw that we were not the ultimate arbiters of divine truth but flawed human beings, I couldn’t pretend otherwise. I couldn’t justify our actions — especially our cruel practice of protesting funerals and celebrating human tragedy. These shifts in my perspective contributed to a larger erosion of trust in my church, and eventually it made it impossible for me to stay.

“I spent my first year away from home adrift with my younger sister, who had chosen to leave with me. We walked into an abyss, but we were shocked to find the light and a way forward in the same communities we’d targeted for so long. It was a relief and a privilege to let go of the harsh judgments that instinctively ran through my mind about nearly every person I saw. I realized that now I needed to learn. I needed to listen.

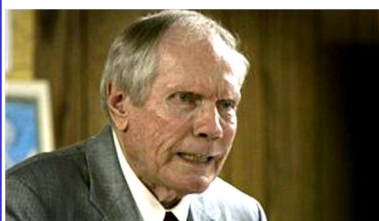
“I can’t help but see in our public discourse so many of the same destructive impulses that ruled my former church. We celebrate tolerance and diversity more than at any other time in memory, and still we grow more and more divided. We want good things — justice, equality, freedom, dignity, prosperity — but the path we’ve chosen looks so much like the one I walked away from four years ago. We’ve broken the world into us and them, only emerging from our bunkers long enough to lob rhetorical grenades at the other camp.

“We write off half the country as out-of-touch liberal elites or racist misogynist bullies. No nuance, no complexity, no humanity. Even when someone does call for empathy and understanding for the other side, the conversation nearly always devolves into a debate about who deserves more empathy. And just as I learned to do, we routinely refuse to acknowledge the flaws in our positions or the merits in our opponent’s. Compromise is anathema.

“We even target people on our own side when they dare to question the party line. This path has brought us cruel, sniping, deepening polarization, and even outbreaks of violence. I remember this path. It will not take us where we want to go.

“My friends on Twitter didn’t abandon their beliefs or their principles — only their scorn. They channelled their infinitely justifiable offense and came to me with pointed questions tempered with kindness and humour. They approached me as a human being, and that was more transformative than two full decades of outrage, disdain and violence.

“I know that some might not have the time or the energy or the patience for extensive engagement, but as difficult as it can be, reaching out to someone we disagree with is an option that is available to all of us. And I sincerely believe that we can do hard things, not just for them but for us and our future. Escalating disgust and intractable conflict are not what we want for ourselves, or our country or our next generation.”



POSTSCRIPT:

Fred Phelps, founder of the Westboro Baptist Church, died in 2014, in a nursing home, having been excommunicated by the church he founded, and far from his family. There was no funeral.

Trials and Tribulations of Transitioning, part 13: The Telecoms Provider 23.12.16 From Debbie Hayton's blog

Firstly, an admission, this isn't part 13; it's the first piece I've written on the subject, though my telecoms provider did supply me with enough material for a dozen articles when I changed my name four years ago. That process was relatively painless, though my enthusiasm waned rapidly. Eventually, however, only two organisations eluded me: the Land Registry and the delightful people who supplied me with telephone and broadband.

The Land Registry requires a Statutory Declaration and payment of a fee. I can't be bothered with that, sorry. Telecoms shouldn't require either but, whilst other utilities responded to a letter or an email, they offered neither a postal address nor an electronic messaging service. It was the call centre or nothing. After several failed attempts to explain my situation to call centre operators far from these shores, I decided that my sanity did not depend on the name on my telephone bill. Indeed, I soon stopped noticing it.

I did, however, notice the size of the bills that rose alarmingly whilst my salary flat lined. When the bill reached £50 per month, I finally cracked and made the bold decision to move to a much cheaper provider. Within ten minutes, Deborah Hayton was a proud customer of BT. All done on line without fuss.

The next task was to cancel my existing service before they took another huge chunk of my wealth. Four years on, every route on their website still led back to the dreaded call centre. But if the alternative was maintaining two telecom contracts, the call centre it had to be.

Debbie (me): I want to cancel my telephone and broadband contract.

*Scandalously Expensive Telecoms Provider (them): *Sales Pitch* Those two words took up fifteen minutes in real time.*

Me: No, I definitely want to cancel my contract.

Them: Are you the account holder?

Me: Yes.

Them: And you are?

Me: Debbie Hayton.

Them: Sorry, that isn't the name on the account.

Me: I pay the enormous bill every month!

Them: But it isn't the name on the account.

Me: Deborah Hayton?

Them: No, sorry.

I gave my partner's name. It wasn't her either. I was at a loss, and playing guessing games probably wasn't going to work when the mystery name was on a screen at the far end. Then I twigged.

Me: Is it – er – Mr Hayton, by any chance?

Them: That's right. Please could you get him? I need to speak to him.

Me: That might be tricky.

Them: I can only deal with the account holder himself.

Himself, indeed! I told them that I would go and get him. I stomped around the house, planning my strategy whilst giving the impression that I was hunting for someone. It took a while but eventually I found him. Deep voice:

Him (not really me anymore): Hello!

Them: Am I speaking to Mr Hayton?

I nearly pointed out that I was Dr Hayton to them, but two of me were quite enough for one conversation. They seemed happy with my performance, and offered to connect me to their Retentions Department. I protested in a newly re-discovered bass voice that I wanted to leave not stay, but they assured me that Retentions dealt with anyone who wanted to leave. However, they would need to deal with me tomorrow; Retentions had already clocked off.

They called back the next day. Mr Hayton was unimpressed with the special rates suddenly on offer. After four years in the closet he was enjoying the moment. He man spread himself over the chair whilst he boomed down the line.

Not Really Me: So now I am leaving, you are prepared to cut my bills in half?

Them: Yes, it is your lucky day!

Not Really Me: But if I had called you a year ago, it might have been my lucky year, or at least a much cheaper year.

Them: We didn't offer deals this good last year.

Not Really Me: I've signed a contract elsewhere. I am going. I am leaving. The parrot is dead.

Actually I didn't say that last bit, but I wanted to.

Them: You sure?

Not Really Me: I'm sure.

Them: Our Export Department will call you back in an hour.

I told Export the same the same story that I had already explained to Retentions, and finally Not Really Me was cut free. His list of two is now down to a list of one. Surely the Land Registry will be simpler than this? But it still costs money so he can wait for his one last hurrah before I am finally finished with him.



Debbie Hayton <https://debbiehayton.wordpress>



Disappointingly, the host of the BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour, Dame Jenni Murray, is the latest to suggest that trans women are not "real women". 5th March 2017

The 66-year-old broadcaster and feminist wrote in the Sunday Times Magazine to make the comments suggesting that trans women can never be "real women" because they could experience male privilege before they transition. Dame Jenni's column in the magazine was titled 'Be trans, be proud — but don't call yourself a "real woman"'.

"Let me make something absolutely clear at the outset. I am not transphobic or anti-trans. Not a Terf in other words. That's trans-exclusionary radical feminist, to use one of the often-confusing expressions that have entered the language in this age of gender revolution. I've no difficulty with men doing whatever they choose to express their feminine side." She adds that she admires Grayson Perry and Eddie Izzard for their gender expression.

Continuing, she criticises statements made by Julie Burchill and Germaine Greer as "cruelly and distastefully" put, saying they "demean" themselves and their "feminist politics".

(I am) "concerned for the impact this question of what constitutes 'a real woman' will have on sexual politics. And for who has the right to be included in gatherings or organisations that are defined as single sex."

Criticising the transition of reverend Carol Stone, who transitioned in 2000 and continued working as a Church of England priest, Dame Jenni says she felt "anger" that "a man claimed to have become a woman". After misgendering the late reverend, she then criticises her for being concerned at what dress to wear and whether to wear makeup or not.

She goes on to criticise comments made by trans broadcaster India Willoughby, who after becoming the first trans woman to co-host Loose Women, appeared on Woman's Hour in December. Dame Jenni writes that she experienced "fury", after meeting Willoughby, that "a male-to-female transsexual could be so ignorant of the politics that have preoccupied women for centuries. India held firmly to her belief that she was a 'real woman', ignoring the fact that she had spent all her life before her transition enjoying the privileged position in our society generally accorded to a man."

She adds: "Your sex, male or female, is what you're born with and determines whether you'll provide the sperm or the eggs in the reproductive process. "

Speaking to trans woman Jenny Roberts, Dame Jenni says that she is part of a group of trans people who "willingly accept they cannot describe themselves as women".

The broadcaster later points to a case of a man who transitioned to be female, then reversed his transition, before quoting actor Rupert Everett who warned parents not to let their kids transition. Of his own childhood, Everett said: "Thank God the world of now wasn't then because I'd be on hormones and I'd be a woman."

She then quotes another trans woman's opinion on a number of reasons trans women want to transition, saying "that some boys who are gay want to adopt the female gender because they're considered effeminate and bullied for it. Others may simply refuse to become the kind of men they know, or want to emulate the mothers they love. Others, generally those who come to transition later in life, having lived as heterosexual men, are sexually aroused by the idea of becoming a woman or say they simply feel more comfortable living life as a woman."

In response today, the BBC says it has warned Murray about "impartiality" – but has declined any formal rebuke against her. A statement said: "Jenni Murray is a freelance journalist and these were her own views, however we have reminded her that presenters should remain impartial on controversial topics covered by their BBC programmes."

A contrasting—and positive—approach:

Whether trans or cis, let women be what they want to be **Gaby Hinsliff** from The Guardian 9 March 2017

When you're on the phone, do you talk most of the time or listen? If you have a technical problem, do you ask advice, or try and fix it yourself? According to a quiz doing the rounds on Facebook, the answers to these and eight more questions predict age and gender with astonishing accuracy. So obviously I took the quiz, and back came the astonishingly accurate verdict: I am a 15-year-old boy.

Rumbled, obviously. But then again, perhaps it's just a clever parody designed to make a point about the crumbling of old certainties. So much for all that Venus and Mars nonsense, about how men never listen and women can't read maps. If there ever was a universal consensus on How to Be a Woman it's dissolving fast, so much so that we suspect the motives of anyone trying to define femininity too tightly. Just let women, and men, be what they want to be. The rules are that there are no rules.

It was in that spirit that parliament this week debated if women should have to wear high heels at work, in honour of the receptionist Nicola Thorp, who was sent home unpaid after objecting to her firm's ludicrously rigid dress code (heel height of two to four inches, six types of makeup to be worn).

It may sound trivial but the case touched a public nerve – the debate was triggered by a petition against dress codes carrying more than 150,000 signatures. It had MPs falling over each other to decry what Labour's Liz McInnes called "quaint, stereotypical notions of what constitutes femininity", designed seemingly only to make women's lives more difficult. Shades of Ginger Rogers, obliged to do everything Fred Astaire did, but backwards in high heels.

And much the same rebellious spirit infuses the box-office hit *Hidden Figures*, the true story of three black female mathematicians working at Nasa in the racially segregated America of the 1960s. Katherine Johnson is mistaken for the cleaner when she enters the all-white office where she will ultimately calculate trajectories for the first US manned orbit of the Earth. When she tells her future husband what she does for a living, he marvels aloud that anyone lets women do that.

Gaby Hinsliff (continued)

She has to be twice as good as the male engineers to be taken seriously – all while conforming to a dress code as ridiculous as Nicola Thorp’s – but goes on to prove everyone wrong in a film whose cheering if unsubtle message is that the sky is literally the limit: that a woman can cover a blackboard in equations as fast as any man, while simultaneously exploding racist assumptions. The rules are that there are no rules. Except perhaps the rules imposed on women by women themselves. Enter Dame Jenni Murray. The BBC Woman’s Hour host has been in hot water all week for suggesting that trans women are not quite “real” women because they haven’t been through the same life experiences; that male privilege may in the past have insulated them from what their sisters go through.

Murray cited the case of a vicar she once interviewed, the Rev Carol Stone, who was ordained as a man before transitioning and apparently responded to questions about women’s long struggle to enter the priesthood with a ‘blank look’ and something about not knowing what dresses to wear. Murray also upbraided the trans TV presenter India Willoughby for saying during a discussion about workplace dress codes that not shaving your legs was “dirty”, suggesting that the feminist case for not conforming to male ideals of beauty must have passed her by.

Some of the bile heaped on Murray has been hideous and it’s disturbing that the BBC has publicly rebuked her for opining on controversial subjects in a way it doesn’t rebuke opinionated male presenters. But that said, her words make me uncomfortable.

For anyone who grew up fearing ridicule at best and violence at worst if they failed to “pass”, or gave themselves away by some tell-tale gesture, the accusation that they’re still getting womanliness subtly wrong – that they’ll never fit – must be unusually inflammatory. It’s easy for me to joke about being mistaken for a 15-year-old boy because in real life, nobody would ever make that mistake. It would be rather less funny if my gender ever had been in doubt.

It also seems cruel to endure the gruelling process of physical transition only to be hauled up for the one thing no surgeon can remove, namely one’s past. For if womanhood is defined as the sum of everything that has ever happened to a woman because of her gender, then logically nobody born with male organs can ever quite attain it. It’s tantamount to saying that you can only be a woman if you’ve always been treated as one.

There are, of course, circumstances in which it is important to define womanhood. It’s hardly unreasonable for women’s refuges to worry about male-bodied people entering shelters; and just because the risk of violent men gaining access in this way sounds far-fetched, it doesn’t make it non-existent. Setting aside inevitable controversies over female changing rooms and loos, there are practical issues to resolve.

But that’s not what Murray was saying. She was essentially accusing both Stone and Willoughby of not matching feminist ideals of what a woman should be. And much as I agree with Madeleine Albright that there’s a special circle in hell for women who don’t help other women – well, if there are no rules, there can be no rules.

It can be no more true that women are all naturally empathetic or sisterly than that we’re all rubbish at maths. The logical consequence of trying to dismantle artificial definitions of femininity – of letting women be what they want to be – is that sometimes they might want to be something you don’t actually like. Murray is right, of course, that women are shaped by the society they move through. But we are not all shaped in the same way by the same experiences.

After all, there are cis women who think International Women’s Day is loathsome guff, who couldn’t give a stuff about female ordination, and can’t see further than their own wardrobe dilemmas. There are selfish women, insensitive women, downright dislikeable women, and women who are just plain wrong about stuff – but while that may make them unsatisfactory Woman’s Hour guests, that doesn’t make them un-women, any more than flat shoes or a knack for quadratic equations does.

You don’t have to agree with a woman to accept that she’s real enough.

Nicky Morgan, former Women and Equalities Minister, is challenging a law on transgender name changes to help transgender people who work in businesses. 24th February 2017

Manchester City Council has announced plans to create the UK’s first retirement community for LGBT people 20.2.17

A council has been ordered to pay a transgender almost £5,000 after they revealed his new identity to his parents. 19.1.16 He had previously used human rights law to cut his parents out of his life after they refused to accept his gender.

Major medical organisations across the UK have condemned any attempt to try to ‘cure’ trans people, in the wake of controversy over a BBC documentary *Transgender Kids: Who Knows Best?* 16.1. 17

A statement from the health bodies said: “We the undersigned UK organisations wish to state that the practice of conversion therapy has no place in the modern world. It is unethical and harmful and not supported by evidence....Sexual orientations and gender identities are not mental health disorders, although exclusion, stigma and prejudice may precipitate mental health issues for any person subjected to these abuses. Anyone accessing therapeutic help should be able to do so without fear of judgement or the threat of being pressured to change a fundamental aspect of who they are.”

The signatories are: *UK Council for Psychotherapy, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, British Psychoanalytic Council, British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies, The British Psychological Society, College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists, The Association of LGBT Doctors and Dentists, The National Counselling Society, NHS Scotland, Pink Therapy, Royal College of General Practitioners, the Scottish Government and Stonewall.*

POSITIVE NEWS FROM THE U.S.A.

(I have also collected 16 examples of negative news relating to trans people's situation in the U.S.A., including of course some of the Trump regime's rebarbative policies, but have chosen to publish the positive!)



A nationwide sorority house in the US has changed its policy to allow trans women to join. 10.3. 2017
Alpha Chi Omega, which carries the motto 'Creating Strong Women', recently changed a policy excluding trans women. The policy was changed in late February, and announced in a statement from the sorority's national headquarters. The sorority is the first to change its *nationwide* policy to allow trans women to join, though some chapters of some houses have already changed their policies.

The feedback has been overall positive, with many chapter presidents saying they have had members approach them positively. Melissa Medved, a member of the sorority, adds: "It pushed Alpha Chi to prove that we are really inclusive and empowering to our women... A transgender woman is just as much of a woman as I am."

A nine year old trans boy has become to the first to officially join the Boy Scouts of America. 9.2. 2017
Joe Maldonado, who has identified as a boy since he was two, previously sued the organisation after he was kicked out for being transgender. However, this week joining a new group in New Jersey, pack leader Kyle Hackler, said it was an "historic" moment, as well as praising Joe for showing "an immense amount of courage". Helping him put on his new uniform and learn the Scout promise and salute, Hackler told Joe: "This means you're the same as Scouts all over the world." "This is fun, I'm so proud," added Joe. "I am accepted, and I'm actually in the Boy Scouts."

Despite being initially accepted into a group in Secaucus in October 2016, he was kicked out a month later after other parents complained. However, in January the organisation announced it would be changing its policy, and invited Joe to re-join a group.

In a statement the Boy Scouts (BSA) said the organisation was "pleased to welcome Joe and the Maldonado family back into the Scouting community."



A transgender girl featured on the cover of National Geographic. 15th Dec 2016
Avery Jackson, who has campaigned for equality for years, is featured on the latest special issue of National Geographic. The issue is focussed on 'Gender Revolution'. "The best thing about being a girl is, now I don't have to pretend to be a boy," Jackson is quoted on the cover as saying. Stories of trans and gender non-confirming young people are featured in the issue.

It also investigates the impact friends, family and communities have had on trans and non-binary people. The special issue being sent to subscribers will feature Jackson, and another version with a group photo will go on newsstands.

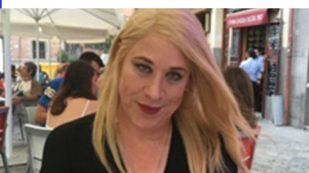
California could become the first state in the US to allow its citizens to opt for a non-binary option on identification. 26th January 2017

Senate Bill 179, introduced by Senator Toni Atkins, would allow Californians to identify as non-binary on official identification documents. It would also streamline the process, allowing citizens to update their gender on birth certificates, driving licences and identity cards.

If the bill is passed, California would be the first state in the US to allow a nonbinary option. The bill's co-sponsor, Senator Scott Wiener, said: "We have transgender people around this country who are living in fear as more and more states strip them of the most basic rights. When they go backwards, we go forwards."

A total of 731 transgender residents of New York City have changed their legal gender following the rule change enacted in 2015. 9th March 2017

The mayor of a small town in North Texas recently came out as transgender, and has become the first out trans elected official in the state's history. 2.2.2017



Jess Herbst, who is the mayor of New Hope, wrote an open letter to residents of the town saying she is trans. Herbst has said she has been "overwhelmed by support" received since she published her letter. Speaking to the Washington Post, she adds: "I'm glad to be able to be myself." Continuing that she wanted to come out to show that trans people are "just like everyone else." Of her own history, she says she "thought I was the only person on earth like this."

A Las Vegas politician is attempting to allow foster children to choose their own gender. 21.2.2017

A bill has been introduced by Assistant Assembly Majority Leader Nelson Araujo, which would allow children to identify themselves with the gender matching their identity. Bill 99 would also mean training and working with LGBT+ youth. Nobody spoke in opposition to the bill during the hearing while a dozen spoke in favour of it.

This is just one example of the fatuous nonsense which one sees on the dark side. Rather funny really...

Right-wingers have blamed “sex change operations” and “transgender bathrooms” for a flooding emergency alert in California. 3th February 2017

More than 180,000 people were evacuated from their homes in California after an emergency was declared at Oroville Dam, the tallest dam in the United States.

Damage to the dam’s emergency spillway coupled with high rainwater sparked the emergency incident, leading to fears of a breach that would risk flooding thousands of homes.

Of course, local Republicans knew exactly who to blame: transgender people.

Breitbart writer Katy Grimes led the criticism in a Facebook post that was shared hundreds of times, writing: “Oroville Dam: Dept. Water Resources ignored warnings 12 years ago – they did not want to incur the extra costs. Instead, CA Gov. Brown and legislative Democrats have prioritized illegal aliens, inmate sex change operations, building homes for the homeless, transgender bathrooms, Eric Holder’s consulting services, and Climate change awareness, as our infrastructure is crumbling.”

UCI Republicans head Ariana Rowlands, also a writer at Breitbart, joined her in blaming “spending on inmate sex change operations and transgender bathrooms”.

Transgender people are helpfully relieving homosexuals of their long-standing role in being the cause of natural disasters. You will be aware that the homosexual agenda has been responsible for several floods and earthquakes in the past, most notably when all the gays getting married in England caused flooding in 2014, as UKIP’s David Silvester helpfully highlighted. The proliferation of the gay agenda also led to retribution in Texas, where God unleashed floods after the city of Houston dared to elect a lesbian mayor.

Meanwhile, the Earth’s convulsion under the weight of human sin last year led to earthquakes in New Zealand.



An extraordinary transgender child has changed the laws of a whole country. 26.12.16

The story of Willa Naylor, 8, was so powerful that Malta now has the most progressive trans legislation of anywhere in the world. It’s now passed the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act, which was dedicated to Willa on its passing. New guidance for schools has been issued.

FOR A STRIKING VIDEO, PLEASE SEE <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/12/26/this-transgender-child-convinced-a-whole-country-to-change-their-laws/>

France has approved new gender recognition rules for trans people that separate the legal recognition process from medical treatment. 13th October 2016

The trans community in Ecuador has been able to vote for the first time as their true gender. 20.2.17

The state of South Australia has announced a new policy to improve the experience of transgender school students. 4th January 2017 The new policy allows students to use gender-appropriate bathrooms, to use their preferred names and to wear uniforms appropriate to their gender identity

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

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

A group of nuns have set up a special school for trans people in Kerala, India 5th January 2017

Pakistan is set to include transgender people in its national census for the first time this year. 9.1.17

A non-binding fatwa signed by 50 clerics in Pakistan has declared that transgender individuals have the right to marry. 28th June 2016

The next Olympic Games have made an important announcement for trans people. 1.3.17 The Tokyo 2020 Games are to introduce the most trans friendly toilet policy ever seen. There is actually a long history in Japan of blurred sexualities and gender-bending practices. The editor can provide more detail if you are interested.



Japan has taken a landmark step with the election of 25-year-old transman Tomoya Hosoda as a councillor for the city of Iruma. 17th March 2017

So, even if there are battalions of bigots, the ignorant and the fearful still to cope with, trans people are not alone.



Michelle Smith, Research fellow in English Literature, *Deakin University*

The history of transgender people in film and literature.

27th January 2017

In Laurie Frankel's new novel *This is How it Always Is*, an American family grapples with prejudice about transgender children. Youngest child of five boys, Claude, in addition to wanting to be "a chef, a cat, a vet, a dinosaur, a train, a farmer" when he is older, tells his parents that he wants to "be a girl". The Walsh-Adams family readily embrace his difference, but the world beyond is less capable of processing the gender non-conformity of a five-year-old child. At kindergarten, Claude is permitted to wear dresses, but is castigated for using the boys' bathroom. After his decision to become Poppy, a school friend's parent threatens violence in the face of Poppy's imagined queer contaminating effect upon his son.

Coupled with a transgender woman being shot on a local college campus after a sexual encounter, the family decides that Madison, Wisconsin is an inhospitable environment for Poppy and moves to more progressive Seattle. Nevertheless, they still find it easier to start again without explaining that Poppy is transgender.

Frankel's novel was inspired by her own experience raising a transgender child. Western culture is currently facing the challenge of understanding transgenderism and the first generation of openly transgender children. John Phillips, author of *Transgender on Screen*, suggests that "the crossing of genders will prove to be the most significant single cultural challenge" of our era "because of the redefinition of sexes and sexualities that necessarily accompanies it". Practical issues such as preferred pronouns, bathroom usage, eligibility to participate in sports, and hormone treatment for young people remain contentious.

In attempting to reshape our understanding of sex and gender, it is helpful to look back at how we have represented – or, most commonly, omitted – transgender people in popular culture. The historical lack of understanding of transgender people is evident in a cultural tendency to depict them as objects of comedy, or, most often, as freakish or monstrous.

Sensational freaks and psycho killers

Ed Wood's cult film *Glen or Glenda* (1953) was designed to shock and is primarily about a man who cross dresses. The film's final section "Alan or Ann", comprised largely of stock footage, is more specifically about a transgender (and potentially intersex) character. Alan was born a boy, but raised as a girl and then served as a man during World War II. While recovering from combat in hospital, Alan learns about gender reassignment surgery and becomes a "lovely young woman". The "Alan or Ann" section of the film was reportedly added to meet distributor calls for a sensational "sex change" film, implicitly suggesting that transgender people were a freakish spectacle who would increase ticket sales. While Wood was sympathetic to the practice of cross-dressing, categorising himself as a transvestite, most horror films and thrillers that followed situated transgender characters as villains. The list of transgender murderers is extensive and persistent from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Homicidal (1961) features a murderous woman, Emily, who wears a wig and prosthetic teeth to conceal that she is, in fact, Warren. Nevertheless, Warren was actually born a girl, but raised as a boy by her mother because his father desired a male child and would have harmed a girl. In keeping with the sensational representation of transgender killers, the film was screened with a "fright break" at its climax, in which audience members could leave the theatre and seek a refund if they were too scared.

Hammer Horror's 1971 film *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* makes the famous splintered personality tale more disturbing by motivating Jekyll to concoct an elixir of life serum with female hormones from murdered corpses. The serum transforms Jekyll into an evil woman, who eventually kills girls in order to obtain more hormones to maintain the transformation.

The 1983 slasher film *Sleepaway Camp* has an infamous final scene in which the serial killer is revealed. The character of "Angela" stands naked, smeared with blood, with her penis clearly visible to onlookers who scream, "Oh my God! She's a boy!" Angela was originally a boy named Peter, but was forced by his mother to assume the role of his twin sister after her death.

Being forced into a particular gender role is clearly traumatic, as in the well-publicised case of David Reimer who was raised as a girl after a failed circumcision. However, the implication of *Sleepaway Camp* and other films with serial killers who are arguably presented as transgender, such as *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) (and even *Psycho* [1960]), is that gender non-conformity is frightening and unnatural. As Phillips suggests, revelations of transgender murderers not only make the killings bizarre and monstrous but also "trade on the otherness of transgender to engender fear and loathing".

Life in pink: transgender children

It is only recently that transgender children have begun to be overtly represented in literature and film. This is indicative of shift from demonising transgender people to greater attempts to understand them and represent them positively, as in mainstream films such as the award-winning *Transamerica* (2005).

One of the first representations of a transgender child was the Belgian film *Ma Vie En Rose* in 1997. It playfully blurs the line between fantasy and reality in order to show the thoughts of a seven-year-old boy, Ludovic, who wants to be a girl. Despite its art-house aesthetic and the fact that Ludovic, as reviewer Roger Ebert suggests, exhibited "no sexual awareness in his dressing up", the film was given an "R" rating in the United States. The rating suggests that two decades ago there was still significant discomfort with the idea of a boy who might not "grow out of" his femininity. It also signals that young people should not be exposed to the reality of transgender children.

This sensitivity explains why there were only a handful of stories intended for children — usually fantasies — that included characters who might be understood as transgender until very recently. The most notable of these is *Princess Ozma*, who appears in every book in L. Frank Baum's *Oz* book series (1900-1920) apart from the first. Princess Ozma is born a girl, but



transformed into a boy named Tip by the witch Mombi, in order to prevent her becoming the ruler of Oz. Tip has no recollection of being a girl when Mombi is compelled to revert him to his original form as the girl Ozma.

Children's books have historically been willing to show boys and girls who "play" as the other gender (often categorised as "sissies" and "tomboys"), but the expectation is that these characters will mature into cisgender, heterosexual men and women.

It was not until the new millennium that a young adult novel featured a transgender protagonist. Julie Anne Peter's *Luna* (2004) depicts a teenage boy, Liam, who progresses from only assuming his true self, "Luna", at night to eventually making the decision to publicly transition.

Victoria Flanagan, in her study of cross-dressing in children's literature, explains that contemporary Young Adult fiction has begun to recognise that "cross-dressing has implications that relate to sexuality and sexual/gender identity". These ideas were previously cordoned off into the realm of adults only, as culture was largely uncomfortable with children reading and viewing stories about queer or gender non-conforming characters.

The next wave of representation

This is How it Always Is is symbolic of the next wave of representations of transgender people. In novels and films for adults, psycho killers who were forced into the "wrong" gender by a parent, or tragic figures such as trans man Brandon Teena, whose real-life rape and murder is dramatised in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), are being replaced by more positive depictions of transgender people. We are beginning to see stories of young people who are being supported by friends or parents to live as the gender with which they identify – such as transgender boy Cole in *The Fosters* – and of teens learning to accept a parent's transition, as in Australian film *52 Tuesdays*.

The newfound ability for transgender children to begin their transition or at least delay puberty means there could be a *transgender boy or girl in almost any school classroom*. Rightfully, novels for young people are also beginning to represent transgender children. Nevertheless, as with the continued challenges to depictions of gay and lesbian characters in fiction for young people, transgender characters are still rare and sometimes considered inappropriate. Now it is not the threat of the freakish transgender monster, but the threat of disrupting long-held ideas about gender binaries that has the most potential to send transphobic people to the fright room

An 11-year-old gender fluid actor has been deemed eligible for awards in both male and female categories in Canada's Leo Awards. 5th February 2017

Ameko Eks Mass Carroll entered the awards for their role in *Limina*, a short film that follows a gender-fluid child on a journey to kindness. Ameko issued a thank you for being considered in the categories, and described it as another step to feeling welcomed. "A ginormous thanks for making people under the trans umbrella feel more welcomed in the world."

Canada's largest national fair has stood up for trans people by introducing an 'awesome' gender-inclusive bathroom sign. 26th August 2016



Netflix - a worldwide release for a documentary about a trans 6-year-old girl. 15.12.2016,

It was announced that the online streaming giant had acquired the documentary *'Growing Up Coy'*, which follows the journey of six-year-old schoolgirl Coy Mathis.

Mathis' case sparked the war over transgender bathroom rights when her family launched a lawsuit against a Colorado school district, after school officials refused to allow Coy to use the girls' bathrooms.

The Colorado Supreme Court eventually ruled that the treatment was discriminatory, and that Mathis should be allowed to use facilities appropriate to her gender identity.

The film, which was released globally on Netflix on January 6, follows the Mathis family through the case and their day-to-day life.

A statement says: "We are thrilled for NETFLIX to release 'Growing Up Coy' into 190 countries. This is a real opportunity for people across the US and the world to watch this film at a time when so many 'bathroom bills' and policies are being considered by lawmakers and school administrators who may have very little first-hand knowledge of the transgender experience.

"Not to mention our Supreme Court justices will weigh in on the issue this March or April!"

Director Eric Juhola told Deadline: ""I don't think there's any other distributor that could get it in front of that many eyes on the same day.

"We're very excited. The whole point of making this film was to try to make a difference in trans rights and trans youth rights. One of the ways to do that is for people to actually see the film and get an understanding of the transgender experience.

"When we were doing our festival tour, we learned that coming to a screening in a public place can be very intimidating for transgender people. So by being able to live-stream the film in their living rooms, it gives those who feel that way a safe place to view it, especially in states and countries where there are anti-transgender laws and discrimination."

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