



Newsletter

November/December 1995

Editorial

As the time draws closer towards the Celebration of the Nativity, children (and parents!) are excitedly putting up their decorations; trees are adorned with their dainty gaily-coloured twinkling lights and flecked with "snow", let us give thanks to God for the Birth of His Son, Jesus Christ, born for us all. Reflect on the following words of hope:-

Without The

WAY

there is no going

Without The

TRUTH

there is no knowing

Without The

LIFE

there is no living.

God's Blessing and Peace with us all this Christmas Tide.

LOVE

It is probably impossible to love any human being 'too much'.

We may love him too much in proportion to our love of God, but it is the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for the man, that constitutes the inordinacy.

THE JOURNEY

And when at last we decided to confront the great distance that divided us we discovered that we had less than a millimetre to cross and that the journey had never happened!

C. L. Lewis

Roula Warrindon-Stavrou

Association for the Pastoral Care of the Mentally Ill

An Association which supports the mentally ill and their relatives

Registered Charity No: 327532

Listening to ourselves, and to God
Speaking to the Churches, and to God

At the morning session before this year's A.G.M. held in the spiritual intimacy of All Saints Battersea, we were all invited to share our reasons why we had become involved in the Association, and what we hope to get out of our membership.

Perhaps this is not surprising, but the phrase "personal experience" came through all the time. Almost everyone had come to APCMI because of links with direct experiences of mental illness. The work on behalf of others usually started from the fact of mental illness being a "way of life"; a father who worked in an 'asylum'; a mother who was permanently a depressive; a period of profound personal disorganisation ... We are without doubt NOT an association of do-gooders, but rather a means for people to share in solidarity their suffering with others, and in so doing to bear the pain and agony.

This is not to say that there is not tremendous talent and professional expertise around. We all realised that the particular charisma of Dennis Murray had so much to do with the growth of APCMI, and that we continue to need more spiritual entrepreneurs to carry us forward. But there is already that talent at hand; we have two well-respected chaplains of outer London Hospitals; we have two paid coordinators who have the time and authority to promote the work in a way that volunteers alone can never do. On the committee, we have a member who has been a MIND manager, a social service Community Worker, a competent financially-qualified person to be a shrewd treasurer, a teacher who can teach and get around, a psychiatric nurse, a priest with a special vocation towards mental health, a pastorally-mature branch chair, ... The Association's strength lies in a recognition of this mixture of spiritual solidarity derived from personal experiences shared and a firm activism to promote ways of providing support and friendship to those who are going through times of darkness and difficulty. "Insight" was a word well used; to be a friend needs an insight of where the other person is, and such insight can only be gained from a personal integration of the meaning of the madness (to misquote John Foskett).

Here are some of the words and phrases people raised ... Exploration, a calling, inner wounds, unseen sufferers, isolation, education, awareness, positive mental health, "in it together", mental illness is disempowering, marginalisation, ordinary feelings which are the same as others, we are all on a journey ... this is indeed a phrase-book for the Association. Each word raises images of that personal experience and talent that we all spoke about.

And so, out of this sharing, how did it help us to give messages to the Churches? ...

"Help! You are not listening!"

Make more of a focus on mental health - You need to give more time on the Church agendas.

The Church could be a Health Promoter as far as mental health is concerned.

Your own congregations are damaged; be honest in Church and listen.

Don't use inappropriate language. Be more spiritually aware. Remove negative attitudes.

Jesus Christ was to be found amongst those who were judged.

In service to others we find a common ground. Be known by our love. "Own it"

Stop and listen. Recognise the extent of the problem.

Understanding, acceptance, love...this is the real challenge. To love those not easy to love.

"We are not alright" Suffering is part of growing.

There is a way through - and that applies to everybody.

JESUS is the EXAMPLE.

There is a big agenda here. Plenty of scope for speaking out with voices that can penetrate hearts with the conviction born out of suffering and love.

Jeremy Boutwood
Chair

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - CROYDON BRANCH

I was honoured to become Chair of the Croydon Branch of APCMI at this most important point in it's development.

Along with several volunteers and members I have been involved since it's beginnings in 1988 and have seen our early plans develop slowly but surely. This year we were delighted to receive funding from the Joint Consultative Committee for our first paid worker. A milestone for any group.

Mary Hillier, our new Development Officer began in February this year and is now firmly established in our new office in Cornerstone House. Mary has brought to our group her energy and expertise and as a direct result of her enthusiasm and hard work we have already realised our ambition to open a second Drop-in, this time in the North of the Borough.

Like our South Croydon Drop-in, the Rainbow Club - the Norbury Drop-in welcomes all comers. I would like to record an appreciation to both South Croydon Centre for the Elderly and Norbury Methodist Church for the hire of their excellent facilities.

The Fairways Club is slightly different. Members are introduced through Westways Rehabilitation Unit and are supported by our volunteers and a staff member from Westways and we much appreciate the use of a base and mini bus being made available by MIND in Croydon. This demonstrates our wish to work as closely as possible with other caring agencies.

Training and support for our volunteers is given the highest priority and we are about to embark on our 7th Training Course. We find that many people are willing to offer friendship and time but need information, guidance and support in order to feel confident in this sensitive work. We continue in our aim to remove the stigma sometimes still attached to mental illness, and raise awareness of practices which promote good mental health for us all.

Reverend Andrew Wilson, our Chaplain who facilitates the Training Course as well as the Support Groups for volunteers, is always a constant source of strength and wisdom to members and volunteers alike and we thank him most sincerely for all his hard work.

I would also like to thank the officers, committee members and all the volunteers for the time they have given over the past year. We look forward to next year when, with Mary's help and support, we hope to enrol more volunteers, make more contacts with church and community groups and most important of all attract new members to our activities.

APCMI has it's roots in recognising the spiritual needs in everyone. Sometimes this manifests itself in religious terms and sometimes in broader terms such as issues about self worth, a sense of belonging or life's purpose. I feel our work is well summed up by Henri Nouwen in an extract from his book "The Way of the Heart".

"Compassion is hard because it requires the inner disposition to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely and broken. But this is not our spontaneous response to suffering. What we desire most is to do away with suffering by fleeing from it, or finding a quick cure for it. As busy, active, relevant ministers, we want to earn our bread by making a real contribution. This means first and foremost doing something to show that our presence makes a difference. And so we ignore our greatest gift, which is our ability to enter into solidarity with those who suffer".

Barbara Vigar

THE COST OF CARE IN THE COMMUNITY BY THE COMMUNITY

The Israelites loaded a goat with their burdens and turned him loose into the desert. Listening to the news it seems that we load the 'government' with all the shortcomings of our failure to provide adequate 'care'.

No doubt the Israelites picked a particularly 'naughty' male goat and some may feel the current government could do better. BUT:-

If Care in the Community is to achieve its potential in improving the lifestyle of those doubly disadvantaged, then the Community - that's you and me - need to follow the example of the Samaritan by truly owning the responsibility of caring for those lying wounded at the wayside.

Mental illness, sometimes leading to suicide, is one area where non-professional support can be crucial. Indeed often the precipitating cause can be the very lack of a caring environment. The sense of ISOLATION of those we fail to listen to, or otherwise ignore, is thereby increased to an unbearable state. Yet this is an area that seems neglected by the Church.

One recent response by the Church is in supporting BEFRIENDING schemes. These provide a structure for responding in a more positive way to those discharged back into the community. It may not be possible to establish in commercial terms their effectiveness. But undoubtedly the quality of life is enhanced by the possibility of relationship even if limited to agreed boundaries.

The Healing miracles of Jesus reflect the act of voluntary befriending. For example Jesus's meeting of the leper (Mark 1: 40-42) is highlighted by a reaching out in acceptance - Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the leper. As Elizabeth Stuart in 'Through Brokenness' (Fount 1990) comments "that touch said so much it said God loves you and I love you as you are, as a leper, as a suffering, broken man". Christy Nolan - the young Irish spastic who won the 1987 Whitbread Biography award - in introducing his book writes "accept

me as I am and I will accept you for what you are accepted as".

Care in the Community BY the Community is about accepting people where they are, warts and all. True we may challenge unacceptable behaviour but in any such challenge we need to affirm the person is loved by the God we believe in.

At the recent conference on 'Metropolitan Mental Health Care' the opening address highlighted two particular concerns related to current shortfall:

The unreadiness of the wider Community to accept those who have been in psychiatric hospitals back as part of society, and: the Spiritual implications of an awareness of powers beyond human normal perception, maybe demonstrating a sense of a greater reality rather than an absence of material reality.

It seemed to me disappointing that most of the remaining time was consumed with 'horror' stories linked to lack of facilities, in particular acute beds in London. The financial talked out the spiritual.

An exception was the importance of personal relationships emphasised by one professor of psychiatry as being at the 'core of treatment'. However he warned that the current trend of market forces was leading to a primacy of measured achievement which severs such relationships.

The following night the emphasis on funding was re-enforced to me when a young lady was referred from a Hospital A & E dept. to a teenage night shelter in Soho. Presumably there were no spare beds despite her being first referred to them for a psychiatric assessment!

But despite concern at such shortcomings let us not be distracted from the belief that real healing can not be bought with money, only with love. That I believe is the message of Christian Healing and indeed of others, whose faith is known to God alone, who are alongside the sufferer as part of Community Care.

Brother Adrian Tate SSJE

QUESTIONS

"If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand".

According to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, the essential thing about an Association is that it is a group of people who have come together because they share a common purpose. But is this so with APCMI? Do we all have the same objective?

And what about Pastoral Care? The dictionary defines it as "the protective care or guidance over a group of people". From this isn't there a great danger of being patronising? Surely it should be a two-way process.

And what do we mean by mentally ill? For example, couldn't we easily mix it up with, what to us, is bizarre behaviour? For me "mental illness" can be a means of spiritual growth. And that it is a groping towards wholeness - a spiritual search. Something we have to undergo; or even undertake.

And are we confining our association too narrowly? For the Church as a whole does not seem to be all that interested. By contrast the people who really have the experience are the chaplains. For they know that they cannot put on a front, but have to be themselves. Reality is the name of the game. Therefore, are we confining ourselves too much to the Church with a capital "C"?

The essence of our relationships should be humility. A stepping aside to usher in the spirit of God. A kenosis.

Peter Sommers

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NAME CHANGE

At the AGM on 23rd September after counting the members votes both postal and those present at the meeting the new name from 1st January 1996 subject to the approval of the Charity Commissioners will be:-

THE ASSOCIATION FOR PASTORAL CARE IN MENTAL HEALTH - APCMH

GIANTS, WIZARDS AND DWARFS

from All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten by Robert Fulghum.

Giants, Wizards and Dwarfs was the game to play.

Being left in charge of about eighty children seven to ten years old, while their parents were off doing parenty things, I mustered my troops in the church social hall and explained the game. It's a large-scale version of Rock, Paper and Scissors, and involves some intellectual decision making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody knows which side you are on or who won.

Organizing a roomful of wired-up gradeschoolers into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, achieving consensus on group identity - all this is no mean accomplishment, but we did it with a right good will and were ready to go.

The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out: "You have to decide now which you are - a GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DWARF!"

While the groups huddled in frenzied, whispered consultation, a tug came at my pants leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small, concerned voice, "Where do the Mermaids stand?"

Where do the Mermaids stand?

A long pause. A very long pause. "Where do the Mermaids stand?" says I.

"Yes. You see, I am a Mermaid".

"There are no such things as Mermaids".

"Oh, yes, I am one!"

She did not relate to being a Giant, a Wizard, or a Dwarf. She knew her category. Mermaid. And was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand. She intended to participate, wherever Mermaids fit into the scheme of things. Without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted that there was a place for Mermaids and that I would know just where.

Well, where DO the Mermaids stand? All the "Mermaids" - all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes?

Answer that question and you can build a school, a nation, or a world on it.

What was my answer at the moment? Every once in a while I say the right thing. "The Mermaid stands right here by the King of the Sea!" says I.

So we stood there hand in hand, reviewing the troops of Wizards and Giants and Dwarfs as they roiled by in wild disarray.

It is not true, by the way, that mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I have held her hand.

I heard this story at an anniversary service in a Unitarian Church in Sussex and felt that it had a very appropriate message for all of us in the Association.

Pam Freeman.

NOTES FROM THE SECRETARY

Since I took early retirement from teaching at the end of July 1994 I have been privileged in my capacity as Secretary of the Association to help to forge links with other groups and promote our work.

During the last year I have attended a European Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and the Annual Conference of the Guild of Health - visited the branches of York - Hastings - Guildford - Bexley and Merton; attended an NSF conference on recent drug developments and visited a friendship circle of Toc H in Biggleswade where I received a very warm welcome.

A very successful Summer School at The Institute of Contemporary Christianity Mind Your Health produced a wealth of speakers and I benefited a great deal from attending it.

I have represented the Association at a new venture this summer. Arising out of a festival for peace held at St John's Church, Waterloo, I have been part of a steering group called Waterloo Breakaway. This is a joint project between the Church and the Day Centre who cater for homeless people in the crypt. Day trips have been organised throughout the summer and early autumn and the steering group are planning to develop the work and hopefully provide breaks away for the homeless, many of whom have never been away from Waterloo for several years. A group of young people plan to research the area to ascertain the needs so that future plans could well involve other disadvantaged groups in the locality.

I feel very optimistic about the work of the Association - I have met so many dedicated and enthusiastic people wherever I have gone who care very deeply for the sufferers and their families. Very good examples of excellent care and practice can be seen. I feel the Association and other like minded groups are providing essential care in the community, giving love and friendship to many marginalised by society. The needs are great but be heartened by the advice I was once given - Don't do nothing because you can't do everything.

Every good wish to you all in your work.

Pam Freeman

NEWS, ITEMS & QUIPS

IMPORTANT DATE FOR DIARY

Sunday October 20th 1996

Southwark Cathedral

3.00. Choral Evensong

Preacher: Bishop of Ely-Stephen Sykes

Occasion: 10 Year Anniversary of
APCMI will be inaugurated at the above
service.

Refreshments will be served after the
service.

EDITOR

We are very pleased to welcome
Mrs Angela Anderson who has agreed to edit
our magazine for us. We hope to produce our
next issue in Spring 1996.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

All articles - news - views to:

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DEADLINE DATE FOR ITEMS

All items for inclusion in your next Newsletter
should be submitted no later than **Tuesday
16th January, 1996.** Thank you.

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The Wonderful idea of Christmas!

*Quote from a young American saleslady in a
department store (taken from one of Denis
Norden's Outtakes for It'll be alright on the
night):-*

*" I think Christmas is a wonderful thing -
I think they should have it every year!"*

Merry Christmas - Happy New Year!