

NEWSLETTER

January 2001

THE CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

To the lost Christ shows His face: To the unloved He gives His embrace:

To those who cry in pain or disgrace, Christ makes with His friends a touching place.

(From the hymn by John I Bell and Graham Maule)

Every now and then I come across a reference to APCMH in some other publication. A few months ago, the Fellowship of Hope newsletter quoted passages of Rhona Macmillan's talk to an APCMH meeting in Woking. The text of the talk had been published first in our own newsletter. And a few days ago I read in the newsletter of a local NSF project an article by the Reverend Peter Smith about the APCMH Haslemere Group in which he said: "A few years ago we affiliated to the Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health (APCMH), and the annual meeting of APCMH last week took as its theme – Being Alongside – which seems to express exactly what we try to do at Grapevine, the name of our Centre", I hope that there are other e, maybe unknown to us, of our messages and values being referred to and adopted by other people and organisations.

I find this very encouraging. It suggests that, in some small way, we are spreading our messages. The national committee has come to recognise that, at least a present, it should not raise expectations that it can provide care or support itself to any significant extent. We now see our main role as one of encouraging others to "be alongside" people with mental health difficulties and their relatives. Our new leaflet emphasises this approach. The annual meeting at All Saints, Battersea, with inspiring contributions from Cannons John Foskett, Chris Mackenna and Ivor Smith-Cameron, focussed on this theme. The culmination of the day was a most moving service rededication led by the Reverend Andrew Wilson. There were about 45 people present and there was a wonderful sense of unity and enthusiasm. I hope that this reflects the feelings throughout our Association.

As we look forward to the coming year we will be trying to find ways of spreading our messages further afield. We want to increase our network of supporters and newsletter circulation and attract more "hits" on our website. We hope that our action sheets and resources will prove helpful to those who want to have them. And we hope that some people will be inspired to develop new local activities in line with APCMH aims and values.

One definite event for the New Year is the day with Jim Cotter entitled "*Soundings from a deep depression*" on Saturday 10 March 2001 at St Paul's Church, Rossmore Road, Marylebone. Jim is an ordained minister who has recovered from a serious mental breakdown. He is a well-known author and speaker. His books include "Brainsquall" which is about his breakdown. One point he emphasises in this book is the value he placed on the visits he received when he was in hospital even though the conversations were so difficult. In effect he is confirming the importance of those who were "alongside" him at this time. The day should be a very special one and I do encourage you to book a place if you can make it.

Meanwhile my hope and prayer for the New Year is that more people will be alongside each other and make, with Christ, a "touching place" for those in pain, distress or isolation. May God bless you all.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours; yours are the only hands with which He can do his work; yours are the only feet with which He can go about the world; yours are the only eyes through which his compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

(Teresa of Avila's prayer)

John Vallat

APCMH Annual General Meeting held on 4 November 2000
Chairman's Report

Overview

During the past year we have established a framework and structure for taking forward the work of the Association. Members have been kept informed of our progress through our quarterly newsletters. In summary we have implemented the following.

- The incorporation of a new company limited by guarantee to take over the work of APCMH using the same name and its registration as a charity.
- A registered office and postal address at St Marylebone Parish Church.
- The transfer of APCMH to the new company with effect from 1 October 2000.
- A new leaflet with new slogan and core values.
- An affiliation agreement for new local groups.
- A web-site at www.pastoral.org.uk.
- Development of some resources including action sheets and book list.
- The appointment of Carole Allen as our administration assistant. (since resigned)

The work of the Association

Nationally we see our role as encouraging attitudes, understanding and action. But it is at local level that the work of the Association becomes relevant. Our hope is that our new framework will enable us to make an impact in new localities. The fruits will be seen if, but only if, lives are improved as a result of local activity or positive attitudes prompted by what we are doing. Meanwhile the work of our local "branches" remains the main component of our Association. The national committee does not forget this. We hope that in the coming year we may be able to have more contact with the "branches" than we have managed in the past year while we have been concentrating on our own structure.

The coming year

Hopefully we will set our objectives at our first committee meeting after the AGM.

But I anticipate that we will concentrate on the following:

- Further development of the web-site
- Further development of our resources and action sheets
- A pack for setting up local groups including applying for independent charitable status and insurance
- Developing our network of supporters including "partners", some form of a Council of Reference and affiliated groups
- Meeting with "branches" to discuss ways in which we might support them
- Considering a programme of nation and/or regional events
- The possibility of a nation conference at St Marylebone Parish Church on Saturday, 10 March 2001 with the Rev Jim Cotter as our speaker and facilitator
- How to spread our message through the media and other forms of publicity
- Ways of increasing the annual income available to the nation committee from the current figure of about £3000 to a more realistic target of about £10,000.

The Role of our members

Our members are our main resource. I would encourage all members to consider :

- Contributing to the newsletter
- Telling us about useful contacts eg names of possible speakers/trainers, interested potential members.
- Adding to our resources and action sheets
- Encouraging new members and groups to become affiliated
- Starting local initiatives
- Ways of fundraising
- Participating in APCMH conferences and seminars

Committee Changes

Treasurer : Neil Mackenzie gave us notice of his wish to resign as treasurer some 18 months ago. He is standing down at the AGM though he will prepare the final accounts for the old Association before its dissolution. We are very grateful to him for his many years of loyal support and good sound financial housekeeping. Flora Njoku has agreed to become our treasurer though she can only commit herself to this role for a year. We still need to look for someone to become our permanent treasurer.

Committee : David Walters is standing down after several years on the committee including a time as acting chairman. Many of his ideas for APCMH have been implemented and we may well still see others being adopted in the future. We thank him for his contribution.

Chair : As agreed at the last AGM, the chair is to be elected by the members at the AGM. I feel that my main contribution has been to help establish the new framework and structure that we have now done. I would prefer to see someone else take us forward on the next stage of our journey. But, after some hesitation, I have agreed with the committee that, if elected, I would continue as Chair for one more year.

Finally, Thanks : To the Committee, Mary Hillier the national committee's consultant, Margaret Norris APCMH help-line telephone contact, Chris Mackenna our host at St Marylebone Parish Church, Lionel Perkin our web-master, John and Leona Rawson editing and typing our newsletter, Canons Ivor Smith-Cameron and John Foskett, our speakers, Bishop Stephen Sykes and Professor Andrew Sims our patrons and to everyone else who has supported and encouraged us on our journey.

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**The first part of an Act of Re-dedication for APCMH  
Made at the Annual General Meeting November 2000**

*Taize Chant : Stay with us, O Lord Jesus Christ, night will soon fall.  
Then stay with us O Lord Jesus Christ, Light in our darkness.*

We have gathered here in the name of God, to renew our commitment to one another, and to dedicate ourselves and our Association to the care of all who pass through the dark places of life, darkness of mind and spirit. It is a work we cannot do in our own strength, and so we turn to God, the source of all healing and peace.

The Lord is my light and salvation : **Whom then shall I fear?**  
The Lord is the strength of my life: **Of whom then shall I be afraid?**

Light of gladness, Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, Our King most holy,  
Shine among us in your mercy, earth and heaven join their hymn.

Let us sing at sun's descending, as we see the lights of evening,  
Father, Son and Spirit praising, with the holy seraphim.

Son of God, through all the ages worthy of our holiest praises,  
Yours the life that never ceases, light which never shall grow dim.

Father, we give you thanks that on their journey through the wilderness you led your people by a pillar of fire through the darkness. Kindly Light, today you lead us onwards. May the light of the risen Christ scatter the darkness from before our path, and through us may he bring light to those who still sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Guide our feet into the way of peace.

**May the Light of lights come into the dark places of our hearts. May his Spirit  
Come to be our wisdom.**



## *A Letter to the Editor*

I have been receiving APCMH newsletter for a year or two now and, over that time, it has become clear to me (a) how very heartening that such an organisation as APCMH at last exists (b) how saddening that the newsletters seem to contain little enough input from "the mentally ill" themselves.

Or perhaps I should say "ourselves". I had my first hospital admission the year (1979) after graduating, and was finally diagnosed Schizophrenic in 1995 – so my credentials are pretty good.

Also, my interest is a longstanding one, in church/hospital interface. The year of my first admission to mental hospital was also the year of my conversion to the Roman Catholic faith ( I was brought up an Anglican), and it was at times an intensely ironic experience to find myself relying simultaneously on two equally severe but very different institutions – Catholicism and psychiatry – for support in a lonely world. Both were so to speak, alien, unexplored territory, and both seemed to receive me gladly as though I were offal that no-one else wanted. Perhaps that is to be overly subjective. At any rate, I remember telling myself wryly that both institutions seemed ways of relating to society via the lowest common denominator.

I attend RC mass only rarely these days, having fallen back upon Anglican church attendance – but I am still very much in the care of psychiatry (in the community).

Having read the newsletter, I feel as though it breathes a certain spirit of forbearance and, encouraged by this (not foolishly, I hope), I intend to offer here a perspective which differs fundamentally from the predominant tone which is set when most or all of your contributors see their Christian faith as a means to be strong and thereby to help the "mentally ill"

As it happens, I lost my faith (i.e. in the literal truth of the Gospels) ten years ago – so why the church attendance? And why the desire to contribute here? Because I would like to share the joy that comes in affirming every scrap and every shred of meaning in the Gospel message other than the literal one – an ongoing process which reveals itself as a surprise every new step of the way. For me, what is affirmed every time I attend the Eucharist is the human desire – against the odds, in my case, it must be said – for humility. The mystery of the bread and wine is for me a symbol of all the things which I can never grasp – and there are just so many of these, even for someone who may, like myself, have "grasped" that Jesus never rose literally. Principal among them is the mystery of his own consciousness.

As a "mentally ill" person with no real place in the community (except insofar as misfits are tolerated) it means an enormous amount to me to find in church a space where an encounter may be had, by enactment, with a collective symbol which spells relief from the world's madness, as well as relief from my own.

*John Wetherell*

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God is love. God is life. God is

A comforting hand placed lovingly upon the shoulder
A heartfelt embrace
Warm sunlight at the close of day
Autumn leaves cascading down
The first frost of winter
The gentle breeze upon my face
Petals blowing in the wind
Kind words from a true friend
A carpet of fallen snow
The rippling waters of a river, flowing to the sea
The way the sea gently laps the shoreline
The swaying branches of a forest of trees

The sound of children playing
Wild horses grazing upon open pastures
The echoes of laughter that fill a room
The bond between a child and its mother
Soft music playing upon a starry night
The beauty of birdsong at dawn
A newborn baby cradled in its mother's arms
A compassionate and understanding world
that cares for the needs of all its people
God is love, pure sweet love
And, Lord, I love you.

Sent in anonymously

LIFE WITH DEPRESSION

Mental Health problems have no boundaries
It can happen to anyone regardless of race, gender,
Age and class. It doesn't mean you're not bright.
Because it's not physical it doesn't mean it's not there!
Depression occurs so frequently that it is often called the psychiatric
Common cold.

My experience of depression :

I feel I'm stuck in a deep, dark black hole – I can't get out.
I feel isolated, lonely, tearful, angry and low.
Isolated as no-one understands exactly how I'm feeling,
Even those who've been there don't really remember
The torment.
Lonely because I've cut myself off.
I don't want people to see me like this. I'm tired of
Putting up a front (a clown with a face).

I can't stop crying – some say it's good to cry. Angry because I hate
Myself for being like this – there's no reason. The low is awful,
Nothing to laugh about. How did I get in this hole? I don't know,
How to I get out? If I do get out it will happen again and again –
That's depression!! It's like being locked in a prison and someone
Has thrown away the key. I hate it. Life has no meaning – I'm just
Existing. I want this torment to end.
There's nothing anyone can do.
I've just got to ride with it until it does end.

(written by Fiona Lynn – contributed by Jeremy Boutwood)

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### **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

What is it that keeps me occupied day and night?  
Well, there are many things –  
Living is an occupation  
If the quality of life is worth living.

To sleep, perchance to dream  
As long as the dream isn't a recurrent nightmare  
And what have I to lose?  
Nothing if life is worthless  
But everything if life is worthwhile,

And what shall I do?  
What is it that make my life worthwhile?  
Only when I give it to others is my life fulfilled  
Then there are not enough hours in the day  
To work, rest and play

And what would you have of me  
That I can give to you freely?  
Nothing greater than love –  
For what can I give that is greater than true love or true friendship?  
Let this be my occupation  
It is very therapeutic

*Bill Craggs (written at the Barton Centre August 1998)*



## ***SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND MENTAL HEALTH***

When I lived on a run-down housing estate in Hackney in the late 80s, one of our neighbours, whom I will call Carol, was an Afro-Caribbean single mother with two teenage sons. Carol had no 'phone of her own, so when she wanted to make a call she used to use ours and stay for a cup of tea and a chat. She was a member of a local charismatic Pentecostal Church and used to enjoy her Sunday visits to the church and the social life it provided for her. She was a good singer and loved the church music. She told us also that she suffered from depression and used to visit us when she was feeling particularly low. On one of those occasions, she used our phone to talk to the pastor at her church about how she was feeling and to see if he could help her. The pastor told her that her depression, and the feelings it engendered, were the work of the devil and that if she sent the devil packing she would feel better. He told her to believe in Jesus Christ, to pray more and to come to the church for deliverance. That was the only way she would be cured.

Three comments about that incident. First, it illustrates two different cultural perspectives and Carol, in a sense belonged to both. Modern Western scientific culture sees depression and mental distress generally, as a clinical condition and doctors, psychiatrists and therapists are enlisted to deal with it. Carol had consulted her doctor and regularly took anti-depressants. In the particular Christian religious culture of the pastor, however, depression and other mental disturbances are interpreted as invasions of the devil, and belief, prayer and religious rituals are invoked to deliver the person from the malign spirit who has taken hold of her. My second observation is that in this case the pastor's suggestion was not at all helpful in relieving Carol's distress. On the contrary, her distress was intensified. Carol had little self-esteem at the best of times, and, as a result of the conversation with the pastor, her feelings of guilt and shame increased. If the devil was at work in her, then she must be evil and unclean, a 'bad woman'. And my third comment is that, in writing about spiritual direction or guidance in relation to mental distress, the approach illustrated by Carol's pastor is emphatically not what I have in mind.

All the great religions have traditions of spiritual guidance. My experience of such guidance is within the Christian Churches, and in the compass of a short article such as this it is not possible to discuss spiritual direction in other contexts, whether religious or not, though this raises very interesting issues. Within Christianity, it is in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox Churches that the practice is most commonly found. Here spiritual direction or guidance is an activity in which one person who has the necessary experience, knowledge and skills helps another to find and sustain health and maturity within a context of faith and a living relationship with God. It usually takes the form of a one-to-one conversation, either in a single meeting or, more effectively, in meetings at regular intervals. The content of the conversation is not so much the religious ideas or beliefs of the person who seeks guidance, though these are important, but her experience. A particular, though by no means exclusive focus, is what the person who comes for guidance sees as her religious experience, whether that occurs in prayer, in other specifically religious settings or in the course of everyday living. The underlying assumption in such guidance is that God is a God of life and freedom and desires people to grow into the fullness of their own humanity.

Here I wish to highlight a few ways in which such a conversation, conducted on a regular basis, might foster mental health. I am not suggesting this as a substitute for the appropriate treatment offered by mental health professionals but as a complementary support.

In *Mental Health and Religion*, Kate Leowenthal points to a body of research suggesting that the social support offered by religious groups and communities may "enhance well-being via feelings of acceptance, identity and shared purpose, self-esteem and feelings of coping" (143). She also mentions a study that showed that, in certain circumstances, having a confidant helps to protect against the onset of depression (141).



The kind of guidance I have in mind here offers just that: a "soul-friend" who not only provides a confidential, trustworthy and non judgmental listening ear, but also has the skills, experience and knowledge necessary to facilitate personal growth and well-being. A skilled guide will foster mental health by helping the other person to understand, reflect on and come to a sense of the value of her religious experience. By religious experience, I mean those experiences that a person herself interprets as having a religious origin, significance or value. These may include claims of hearing voices or being commanded by God or the devil, 'mystical' experiences, certain types of mood or feeling associated with religious events, places, times and activities, an awareness of the presence of God within the circumstances and relationships of daily life, or a devastating sense of the absence of God. Christianity, like all the great religious traditions, has a well-trying body of wisdom by which these experiences can be understood, interpreted and evaluated. When acted on, some of them enhance life and well being, while others lead to destructive outcomes. The role of the guide or companion is an enabling one of helping the other person to reflect on her experience and to evaluate it as a basis for making good choices that give shape and direction to her life. Crucially, a guide helps a person to distinguish between those experiences, responses, patterns of behaviour, choices and actions that are truly creative and life giving, for self and others, and those, which are destructive and militate against growth and health.

The presence of such a companion may also have a positive effect on mental health by assisting the other person to explore and evaluate his images of God. Some images, typically those that evoke fear, shame, guilt and low self-esteem, are associated with poor mental health. A skilled and experienced soul-friend will have the ability to enable a person to articulate and reflect on those images of God, which habitually influence his behaviour, and to trace them to their origins in his own experience. In addition, a guide will help to distinguish between those images of God, which promote growth, and health from those, which are destructive, and to offer ways in which a broader range of helpful images might be discovered, explored and embraced. Moreover, if the relationship with the soul-friend continues over a long period, that in itself may become an image of the fidelity of a God who accepts and embraces us human beings in all our weakness and fragility.

Images of God are, of course, intimately connected with self-esteem and with the ways in which we relate to others and to the world at large. People who suffer from mental distress typically show signs of dysfunction in these relationships: in domination, perhaps, or cruelty, abusive behaviour or excessive submissiveness. In addition, they often have significantly little effective freedom, since so much of their lives come under the control of factors and forces which bind the will and impede choice. However, if changes in a person's images of God and relationship with that God can take place, then there is also a possibility of change in these other areas of life. Again, a good spiritual guide will be able to offer some help in articulating and exploring connections between images of God and the rest of life and in finding the wisdom, freedom and energy to negotiate changes in other relationships.

These are some of the ways in which a soul-friend may contribute to good mental health. They are based on the experience, enshrined in the Christian and other religious traditions, that in seeking and contemplating the mystery of God we confront our own fragility. Furthermore, they rest on the belief that right relationship with God has the power to touch and to change not only the way we think but also the deepest recesses of feeling, desire and attitudes for the sake of greater health and freedom.

***This article by David Lonsdale appeared in the November/December Issue of the Bishop John Robinson Fellowship newsletter***



**Christian Council on Ageing**  
**Northampton and Towcester Branch**  
**Are holding a Conference on**  
**"SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND**  
**PASTORAL NEEDS OF PENSIONERS"**

**Saturday February 10<sup>th</sup> 2001**

**9.45 am to 4.14 pm**

**at S. Matthews Parish Centre**  
**The Drive, Kingsley**  
**Northampton**

- Speakers :**
- Sarah Campling** A Parish Worker for S. Matthews Church and leads an active team of parish visitors.
- Dr Gillian Craig** Is a retired Consultant Geriatrician, who is continues to be actively involved in medical ethics.
- Dr Mike Lewis** A lecturer in psychology at University College, Northampton, has a particular interest in retirement counselling and the psychology of later years
- The Rev Bill Simons** Formerly chaplain at St Edmund's Hospital, Northampton. He founded the Nothampton Pastoral Counselling Service.
- Father Tim Pilkington** Is Parish priest for S. Matthews Church Northampton.

|             |              |                                                         |                        |
|-------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Programme : | 9.45         | Registration and Coffee.                                |                        |
|             | 10.15        | Welcome and Prayer:                                     | Father Tim Pilkington. |
|             | 10.30        | "Challenges of Retirement":                             | Dr Mike Lewis.         |
|             | 11.00        | "Spiritual Needs and Gifts of Pensioners:               | The Rev Bill Simons.   |
|             | 11.30        | "The Pastoral Response":                                | Sarah Campling         |
|             | 12.0         | Panel Discussion                                        |                        |
|             | <b>12.30</b> | <b>LUNCH</b>                                            |                        |
|             | 1.30         | "Facing up to Dementia and Disability":                 | Dr Gillian Craig       |
|             | 2.00         | <b>Workshops</b>                                        |                        |
|             |              | a. <b>Visiting</b> , experience of local groups led by: | Sarah Campling         |
|             |              | b. <b>Worship in Homes</b> ,                            |                        |
|             |              | sharing experience, moving forward, led by:             | Fr Tim Pilkington      |
|             |              | with : Gillian Craig, The Rev Bill Simons and others    |                        |
|             | <b>3.00</b>  | <b>TEA</b>                                              |                        |
|             | 3.15         | Feedback and Discussion                                 |                        |
|             | 4.00         | Closing Worship :                                       | Fr Tim Pilkington      |
|             | 4.15         | Departure                                               |                        |

**Conference Fee : £7.50. To Book , write to, or telephone, the Conference administrator :**  
**Mrs Mary Wallis, 13 Manfield Road Abington, Northampton NN1 4NW Telephone : 01604 460987**

***Please Note, Bookings close on 5<sup>th</sup> February***

Conference organised by CCOA, Northampton and Towcester Branch supported by S. Matthews Church, Northampton

**ASSOCIATION FOR PASTORAL CARE IN MENTAL HEALTH**

An association that supports those who are mentally ill and their families

A limited charity company, registered No. 327532

**APCMH c/o St Marylebone Parish Church, Marylebone Road, LONDON NW1 5LT**

The views expressed in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Association

**The editor welcomes contributions for publication, please send them to :**

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