



Being Alongside

Spring 2020

Setting or rising?

**Our association has done good things,
but what is its future?**

*Read about our new vision
and plans for action inside*

Being Alongside Spring 2020

Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health
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Patron: Professor Andrew Sims

Being Alongside is the working name for the Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health (APCMH), a faith-inspired, voluntary association of individual members and affiliated groups who recognise the importance of spiritual values and support in mental health.

It has a network of supporters throughout the United Kingdom. It welcomes and encourages people whatever their faith or belief system. Governed by its National Committee, Being Alongside is primarily concerned to promote and encourage 'being alongside' people experiencing mental or emotional distress.

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Setting or rising?



I'll tell you straight off. The photo on the cover of this Spring 2020 issue of *Being Alongside* is of a sunrise, not a sunset.

That's what the photographer says, and I believe him. But without a church in the picture for orientation, there's no way you would know without being told.

The choice of the ambiguous photo, and of the questioning cover-line, is intended to illustrate the fact that *Being Alongside* / APCMH has come to a point of decision about its future.

Is this the moment at which we should look back with gratitude and satisfaction at what we have achieved over the past three decades, but acknowledge that the association has run its natural course as a national organisation, and should come to an orderly and dignified conclusion, passing its assets on to others with similar aims?

Or is it time for the association to make a fresh start, rededicating itself to the founding aim of promoting pastoral care for people in mental distress, but reshaping the way we try to achieve that to fit both the resources available to us and the changed realities of the age?

Part of the reason you haven't heard from us for a while is because our trustees have been deliberating these questions for the past 18 months. Having attended one of those meetings, I can witness to the soul searching that has gone on.

And out of it has come a plan for a fresh start, and potentially a rebirth of *Being Alongside* in the 2020s. Turn this page to read all about it. And then, *please*, get in touch and get involved. The trustees can't make this happen without your support.

Trevor Parsons, Being Alongside editor

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The future of our association

Our chair **Richard Allen** reveals the trustees' vision and strategy for Being Alongside / APCMH in its fourth decade

APCMH has been working in the field of spirituality, pastoral care and mental health for well over 30 years. Over that period, we've played a part in, and made a difference to, the lives of many people; and we continue to do so right here and now.

In those early days, the Association focused on two main tasks:

1 *Trying to help the NHS mental health services understand the need for appropriate pastoral and spiritual care*

To a significant extent, that aim has been realised. Most NHS Trusts now make fair to excellent provision for the spiritual needs of those for whom they care. Sometimes, this is resourced from their own chaplaincy teams; at other times, it's provided in conjunction with local churches and faith groups.

2 *Establishing and encouraging local projects through a network of branches*

This proved highly successful in the early years. There were a good number of branches in and around London and the South East, and also beyond. Some remained direct branches with particularly close links to the centre; others were affiliates with a more arms' length relationship. A few remain to this day, though most have closed or are running down.

After some frank discussions, it has become clear to the national committee that a change of direction in the Association's work is necessary if it is to survive and flourish. That is as much because the mental health landscape has changed very significantly since the Association was founded. There are so many new challenges, not least in the field of child and adolescent mental health.

As a result of all the contributions we have made over the years, we have acquired an enormous reservoir of experience and expertise. What's more, we are one of the very few charities in the mental health field which links spiritual care with mental ill-health. We have a unique voice, but we tend to speak in a whisper.

So, for the past 18 months or so, the national committee has been doing three things:

- Developing a vision
- Devising a strategy to turn that vision into a reality
- Working out how and where we can link these ideas into practical action

The vision we have provisionally come up with is this:

"Going forward, we will support local mental health pastoral and spiritual care initiatives with information, advice and, where appropriate and possible, seed funding to help projects to get launched and get off the ground. Thereafter, we will be available for such support as is reasonably required."

The strategy to turn this into reality comes in four parts:

1. Objectives

We've started with APCMH's purpose for the future. In order to realise the vision and support local projects, we're looking at our current advice leaflets and our website and working out what we need to add to them. Time has moved on since we originally wrote the leaflets and they need updating. New ones, especially around a subject like safeguarding, need to be drafted.

In addition, if we are going to work collaboratively with other organisations and projects, we need to be clear what values we expect them to hold to ensure they are compatible with ours and that our relationship can flourish.

2. Communication

This is one of the most important areas on which we have to work. It's all very well having a vision, but if we can't communicate it to others, why would anyone take any notice of us?

Historically, we've focused on traditional ways of speaking to our supporters—printed newsletters and the like; and we mustn't abandon this in the short term. But we also need to move into modern communications such as social media. As yet, our digital presence has been rather passive. Other organisations I come across working in mental health and spirituality are far more interactive, encouraging conversations through blogs and Twitter feeds. So why can't we be too? We've already switched our website to run on a new system which makes it easy for multiple individuals to contribute fresh content. It's time for us to start using that and all the other powerful tools we can to get the word out.

And then there's our USP—our 'unique selling point'. What is it that makes Being Alongside / APCMH unique? There is something, actually a great deal, and we should be proud of it. But we need to work out how to tell as many people as possible about it.

So lots to think about, lots to decide, and maybe we need some professional help with this.

3. Governance

This is the boring one, but it's also one of the most crucial. In short, the question is 'will our current structures help us develop our vision?' The answer is 'Almost certainly not.' The existing documents by which we govern ourselves are nearly 20 years old, and that's a long time without review. So we shall have to change things and, for this, we're taking legal advice from experts.

4. Finance

And finally, there's money. There's always money. At the moment, we have little or no regular income. We rely on a few donations from dedicated supporters, together with the occasional generous legacy. So we are busy identifying a number of income streams that will hopefully secure the financial future of the Association. Historically, we haven't needed to budget our expenditure, as it has been relatively small. With an eye to the future, we are introducing annual budgeting as a mark of prudent financial practice. If we are to ask others for money, we need to be able to give them confidence that we will treat it professionally and use it effectively.

That's where we're at. The third strand—the practical action—will, I'm sure, emerge from the work we are doing right now. In fact, we've offered to work with a number of churches in South London on initiatives that they are thinking about. So who knows where this will lead.

And finally, we need to plan for the changes in the national committee. We all agree that we need expertise in areas such as finance and charity law. And we need new ideas, fresh energy and, dare I say it, some younger blood.

So if you think you have something to offer, let's talk. ***Please phone or email me, Richard Allen, directly—see page 2 for contact details.***

We have some criteria that Trustees and committee members must meet; and there will be an interview process. But that's because we value the roles that people undertake.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Hope and confidence in Battersea



Richard Trout gives us a snapshot of the lows and highs of our affiliate, **Battersea Befriending Network**, which is now in its tenth year as an independent charity

THE AIM AND FUNCTION OF BATTERSEA BEFRIENDING NETWORK, (“BBN” for short), which this year celebrates its tenth year of operation, is concisely expressed by its motto and mission statement, “Building hope and confidence together”, and by its logo showing individuals connecting to one another within the local community. Specifically, the individuals it aims to build connections for, by means of supported one-to-one befriending relationships, are those experiencing the extreme social isolation which can be one of the most debilitating side-effects of a mental health condition. And the local community in question, represented in our logo by the iconic figure of Battersea Power Station—in the shadow of which BBN had its origins and still carries out its meetings and training (courtesy of All Saints Church, Battersea Fields)—now extends to the whole of the large and diverse Borough of Wandsworth in south west London.

The value of one-to-one befriending has been demonstrated by the dozens of relationships which have been formed over these ten years

LOCAL GROUPS: BATTERSEA

between our trained volunteers and those who have been referred to us, by the local Mental Health Trust, by Wandsworth Social Services and by other agencies, as likely to benefit from such a relationship. And although most of these have been relatively short-term, lasting between one and two years, a number are still ongoing after seven or eight years and have developed into permanent friendships.

For example, that of volunteer Sue with Leila (not their real names), who, from being too traumatised to leave her home, gradually gained the confidence to go out and about, at first just with Sue, but in time with others whom they met together—until she was able not merely to re-enter full time education but, at the end of it, to obtain a first-class degree.

There have been other cases (if not quite as dramatic) where those befriended have been enabled to regain a sense of purpose and of control over their lives—in keeping with the

“recovery approach” to mental health treatment—even when the symptoms of their condition persist to a greater or lesser extent. But even in cases where that condition is too serious, or has become too deeply ingrained over time, to enable them to re-integrate into society—as is the situation with two older men, each now befriended for over five years, who have had lifelong paranoid schizophrenia—the experience of having a dependable friend of their own who will listen to them and take them seriously, when no one else

does so, and with whom they can take simple outings to a park or a café without undue fear of who is watching them, has been truly transformative for their quality of life: giving them, too, a sense of purpose, something to look forward to every week or two, and moments of rare enjoyment of life, rather than its mere survival.

It is only fair to admit, however, that not every befriending experience is a success story. It is always gratifying when we learn, either at our bi-monthly Support and Supervision Groups or more privately, that a volunteer feels well matched with the person he or she is befriending, and that they get along famously. And until quite recently this has been more often than not the case.

In the last couple of years, however, we have been having to deal with two related problems. The first is that—to a large extent because we have now become well known, and trusted, by the statutory and third-sector mental health services—we are getting somewhat overwhelmed with referrals from them, such that even when we run two befriender training courses a year (where it used to be just one), we are unable to keep up with the demand, so have a permanent waiting list of 20 or more.

But the second problem is that quite a number of those referrals are less satisfactory than they used to be. This is partly because, with the much-

“The value of one-to-one befriending has been demonstrated by the dozens of relationships which have been formed over these ten years”

LOCAL GROUPS: BATTERSEA

publicised cuts in the statutory services over the last decade, some of the teams, in their need to reduce the numbers on their books, are under pressure to discharge those service users no longer considered to be in acute need, and are in effect using BBN as a replacement service rather than the “add-on” we are intended to be.

A consequence of this is that the persons being referred in such circumstances may either not really be that interested themselves in having a befriender (the initiative being all from their referrer) or for some other reason may not be appropriate for befriending—the further consequence being that the befriending relationship either does not get off the ground or breaks down soon after it has started, because the intended “befriendee” withdraws. And a possible further (and particularly depressing) further consequence of this is that




the intended befriender—perhaps a newly trained volunteer—gets discouraged at what has happened and him/herself withdraws.

A solution to this problem, and to other organisational needs, was proposed last year by an expert report which BBN was able to commission, thanks to a grant from the Being Alongside trustees. This was that we should contract the services, for an average four hours per week, of a “Professional Advisor” whose brief, in addition to

“...from being too traumatised to leave her home, she gradually gained the confidence to go out and about, at first just with Sue, but in time with others whom they met together”

assisting in the training of volunteers and acting as a back-up resource to existing befrienders, would be to monitor each referral as it comes in and conduct a “holding visit” to both the referrer and the person referred, for the purpose of (a) checking that person’s suitability for befriending, (b) identifying both any potential problems and any particular interests or features of their story that might later help with an appropriate matching, and (c) if applicable, advise them of the likely length of delay in that matching.

And as the upshot of all of this, I am pleased finally to report that at the beginning of September 2019, after receipt of dedicated funding for at least the first half of the year from the Wandsworth Grant Fund (with other grant applications pending), we were able to contract Tara Osman, an experienced mental health occupational therapist, as BBN’s Professional Advisor. Tara has already hit the ground running—familiarising herself with both our existing befrienders and befriendees and our extensive waiting list, and setting up visits for incoming new referrals—and I have no doubt at all that she will be an enormous asset to the service we provide. A promising way, therefore, for Battersea Befriending Network to begin its second decade....

 batterseabefriendingnetwork.org.uk
 [@bbefriendingnet](https://twitter.com/bbefriendingnet)
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Farewell to Forest Hill

IT WAS WITH GREAT SADNESS BUT ALSO A SENSE OF CELEBRATION

that, on 29th May 2019, our Forest Hill branch met for the final time, after 32 years. The drop-in first opened its doors in May 1987, and it met for two hours almost every Wednesday evening since then.

In its final incarnation, home had been in the hall adjacent to St Saviour's Church, Brockley Rise. Thanks to the generosity of the vicar and its church council, the rent for its use was charged at a reduced rate. Of even more value was the support that previous and the current Incumbent had offered to us.

At the end, around 20 people 'dropped in'. Many were regulars but, over the course of the year, up to 50 different people came by. It was a diverse group, and all the richer for that. Some had started off using the facilities and ended up as part of the group of volunteers running the drop-in.

The venture was the brainchild of Nick and Gail Cotton, two of our national committee members (plus one or two others), who were there right to the end. Everything was run through voluntary effort, and one particular volunteer, Joy Fisher, was there almost from the start and almost every week—she made sure we had food and refreshments! But, as is so often the case, finding new volunteers who are willing to dedicate time on a regular and medium/long term basis proved increasingly difficult. In the end, discussions were held with those who used the drop-in and the difficult decision to close the doors for the final time was taken.

But not before an enormous celebration was held on 29th May. Any excuse for a party! But what an excuse, and what a party. There was fun and laughter, tears and hugs. Memories were shared and thanks were offered. But most of all, for something that was due to mark an ending, there was a sense of optimism. Perhaps, even at the point of closure, something might rise from the embers, phoenix-like. It hasn't happened yet, but who knows. In the meantime, we should all say an enormous thank you to those with the original vision to start it off, the dedication to see it through, and the wisdom to recognise when it needed to end. **THANK YOU!**



A group trip to Worth Abbey in 2013... just one of many happy memories of the Forest Hill drop-in

YOU'LL HAVE SEEN OUR IN-DEPTH FEATURE ABOUT THEIR GROUP IN THE LAST ISSUE OF *BEING ALONGSIDE*. THIS TIME WE HEAR FROM.....

Croydon APCMH members in their own words

“For me the climax of each week is our Friday Eucharist. All of us have experienced mental health problems, ours, or of people close to us. Our healing often continues over lunch in a neighbourhood café, where deep confidences are often shared, and conversation can go on for two or more hours!”



“I find that coming to the Group on Fridays helps me with my prayers. I get ideas that work out at home. It is also good to keep in touch with modern mental health matters, ways of treating the problems. The Monday Mindfulness group helps me to a state of calmness, and my attitude to prayer is sharpened.”

“The Friday Group provides me with the chance of taking my communion each week. From a faith perspective that is a very valuable component of the meeting for me. The group is special because most of us have battled with mental health disorders at some stage in our lives. In my view this commonality of shared experiences helps to bind us together as a group.

“It gives us a sense of mutual acceptance, and the space to talk honestly about challenging faith related issues. An unexpected aspect of the Friday Group for me has been the exposure to the creative skills of some of the group members.

“Highlights have included poetry written by members, musical compositions, and the chance to see some exquisitely carved wooden sculptures. Finally the fact that many members have lunch together after the meetings proves that the group has a genuinely socially interactive element. I am so glad that I joined the group.”

“At Creative Writing a few weeks ago we were thinking about hope and being positive. We read a poem by Emily Dickinson called ‘Hope is a thing with feathers’. It’s hard for me to be positive. Fortunately I am much better now, but these groups help when you are feeling very alone. The problems may not show but they are still close. St Mildred’s is wonderful for opening its doors to those who are feeling depressed, and sad. It helps to see a cheerful face, hear a welcoming voice. All the folk who here are doing work for Jesus.”

30 years, and still counting...

Early in 1989 a small group of people from various churches and mental health charities in Croydon heard of the initiative by the newly founded APCMI, as it then was, to support people with mental health issues pastorally and spiritually. They decided to form a group locally to further its aims, and took part in a training course with Dennis Murray, the Development Worker from the Association.

Later in the year Andrew Wilson was appointed to a innovative post of 'Community Mental Health Chaplain' for Croydon Mental Health Services. The Community Care Bill of the previous year introduced the move from long-term institutionalised mental health care, to more locally based support for people living at home or residential units. (The 650 in-patient beds was finally replaced by provision for 70 beds for the Borough of Croydon, a number which is even lower now).

The Community Chaplain was to work to encourage and inform local churches and faith groups as this radical change took place, and so the birth of a local APCMH group was 'heaven sent' as an effective way of making strong links between mental health services and

"I attend the Friday morning Eucharist at St Mildred's. I feel close to God here. Everyone is very caring and supportive. I enjoy meeting like-minded people."

the community, planning local projects, like Drop-Ins, training and supporting volunteers, and eventually getting local authority funding for a part time post of Development Worker.

The next year saw the opening of our first Drop-In, (finally called the Rainbow) and still going strong on Monday evenings in the south of the Borough. Now two further Drop-Ins provide a warm welcome and safe space for our members on Friday evening and Sunday lunchtime. A Women's only lunchtime Drop-In on Tuesday answers another urgent need.

A significant change to our work came when we were left a substantial legacy, (now all spent!) by a grateful member, whose childhood as an evacuee during the War was marked with suffering and the end of any proper schooling. Her gift to us was

to be used to encourage the independence, and well-being of our members, and so the Creative and Well-Being programme began, which still provides weekly groups for Art, Creative Writing, Meditation, and a Friday Eucharist and exploration of spiritual needs, complemented by various short term courses on well-being and self-care, and regular talks and conferences to spread the word on our work.. We are determined to maintain this work for as long as we can, despite our ever diminishing funds!

Last November a visit by Christopher, Bishop of Southwark to meet us all, after a generous gift from his Diocesan Lent Appeal gave us the chance to celebrate all that we have achieved, and to think about ways in which this vital work can continue.



apcmhcroydon.co.uk

Learning to walk in the dark

Rachel writes...

HAVING WORKED IN MENTAL HEALTH SPIRITUAL CARE AND LOVED IT, becoming unwell with depression and flashbacks to episodes in a very difficult year is teaching me a lot. In years gone by, having had colleagues who were mental health occupational therapists, I recently booked an appointment through the GP to see one as a client. Although I'd always loved the idea that mental illness doesn't discriminate, when illness came to me, I didn't want it. For all my egalitarian ideas, it was an unwelcome guest.

Depression was like having mufflers on my personality; everything I felt was blunted. I would smile, but it took so much energy even to look as though I was responding in ways that were usual. I

couldn't follow conversations easily, had no concentration, and was terrified this was how life would be forever. The distance between the rest of the world and me felt huge, and I was desperate for a route out of this, to get my life back.

On some days I didn't want to go outside, and needed to stay in the safe confines of our flat. I slept 13 hours most nights, waking in time for the news followed by property programmes; exhausted by the effort of a

few hours awake. Things that would usually have given me a feeling of joy didn't. Sadness was like a heavy fog that weighed me down; at other times, like a thick blanket of deep, dark blue that was becoming a comfort, yet closing in on me, reducing my world to one that was small but manageable.

On good days, walking by the river helped me to feel connected to the natural world, part of something that didn't judge me. Gradually, I began to draw again, around the theme of 'if sadness had a voice, what would it say?' trying to put on paper what this felt like to me. It helped get things out of my system.

"I said to my soul, go into the darkness, for the darkness shall be the darkness of God... and the scenes will change as in a play."



As a mental health chaplain, I had collected quotations about darkness, being fascinated by them even when depression was outside my lived experience. I had valued walking alongside people living with depression, and encouraging patience and self-compassion. Now I was really struggling to

practise these myself. I felt helpless, confused, lost and raw.

The quotation that kept coming back to me was from TS Eliot's *Four Quartets*: 'I said to my soul, go into the darkness, for the darkness shall be the darkness of God..... and the scenes will change as in a play.'

I walked one evening by the river in the dark, and decided to use it as an opportunity to notice what I could there. I wanted desperately to be able to find my way around in my inner darkness, and have always enjoyed the feeling of being able to find my way around places in the dark. I was taken by how beautiful the shadows and silhouettes were, how the moonlight illuminated things differently, how the contrasting colours on the tree bark had an ethereal quality to them at night, how much louder the birdsong sounded, and how much I loved the smell of wood smoke from the canal boats as people returned home and lit up their stoves.

"For the first time in the darkness I began to feel something. The stars were so distant, just as I felt hope was far from me, and yet something began to change"

For the first time in the darkness I began to feel something. The stars were so distant, just as I felt hope was far from me, and yet something began to change; perhaps I began to accept that depression would teach me something and let it be rather than fighting it or being annoyed by it.

An increase in medication helped, along with therapy and touch, and I cannot say how much kindness has meant to me, just ordinary kindness and gentleness. I had to learn to take things gently, and rather than fight the depression, feeling angry at having my intelligence and personality robbed from me, to let depression speak to me, to let it be, to have patience with it and myself. There is still a way for me to go, but I hope I don't forget these lessons of dark times.

Progress in Merton & Sutton

David Roe reports

APCMH Merton was established in 1990 as a branch of the APCMH charity, now also known as Being Alongside, with the main aim of establishing a voluntary befriending scheme for persons with mental health problems living in the London Borough of Merton. In 2013 we adopted the new name APCMH Merton and Sutton, to reflect that we had been receiving referrals of persons needing befrienders from the London Borough of Sutton as well as from Merton.

We have normally hold annual training courses for potential new volunteer befrienders, and we held such a course in March 2019, held over 1½ days. It required the distribution locally of new leaflets and notices advertising the course, circulating information to local mental health care services inviting referrals of those needing a befriender, and placing notices on Internet sites inviting potential volunteers to apply to attend. Fourteen potential befrienders attended the course. The experienced trainers were David Roe (Chairman of APCMH Merton and Sutton, and a befriender for 20 years), David Hobbs (committee member, active in local mental health care support groups), and Kamila Markusova (our paid part-time Befriending Coordinator, and a qualified counsellor).

At our AGM in May 2019 we reported that we had 28 active befriending relationships, and in addition those coming through the course were being checked and matched up to referrals.

On 10 August 2019 we held our annual Summer party at the usual excellent venue of St. Mark's Church Hall, Wimbledon. About 30 attended: befrienders, befriendees (those being befriended) and invited guests. All went well in fine weather. Kamila Markusova could not attend as she had recently given birth to her first child. We congratulated her and welcomed the news that mother and baby were doing well.

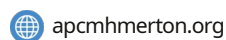
It takes time to establish new befriending relationships – the potential new befriender may not be ready to start, or there might not be a suitable match to a referral, or the selected referral who is to be befriended may not be ready to proceed. Also, as is usual, a few existing befriending relationships come to a natural end, either because of the befriender moving away or a change in their circumstances, or because of the recovery from illness or the death of the befriendeed. In September 2019 we had 31 active befriending relationships (including five new ones), with a further two awaiting introductory meetings.

LOCAL GROUPS: MERTON AND SUTTON

We continue to hold support group meetings for befrienders, which are important in case they have problems they wish to discuss. The last meeting was at a Mitcham venue, and we aim to arrange the next at the more popular Wimbledon venue where we hold our training courses, the AGM and our Committee meetings.

Our Treasurer, Stephen Ryan, has reported that if we held a training course in March 2020 (a year after the last one) our funds would be down to only £1500 by April 2020, which would not be enough to cover outgoings during the process of matching up newly trained befrienders to referrals and getting new befriending relationships going. It was therefore decided to seek alternative sources of further funding before committing to another training course.

New committee member Geoff Shorter, who has experience of fund raising, agreed to pursue funding opportunities through meetings with local businesses; briefing material about APCMH Merton and Sutton has been prepared for this initiative. Kamila Markusova's annual contract as paid part-time Befriending Coordinator/Administrator was renewed in October 2019, with the change that activities related to a new training course would be deferred until funding had been secured.



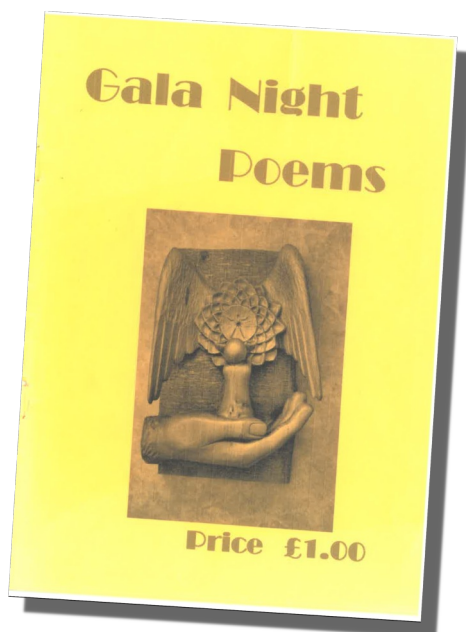
From 'Gala Night Poems', a collection produced by members of Croydon APCMH's weekly creative writing group for a fund-raising music night at St John's Upper Norwood

Our Group

*Here we share healing
share questing;
loneliness
restlessness,
horrendous depression
covered by strong medication.*

*We seek with deep-seated questions,
some in shy silence
reluctant to speak
but listening acutely for answers.*

*Others speak freely, glad to be heard
above rattle of pills,
glad to be sharing but
sometimes too much alone.*





You are invited to the

Annual General Meeting

of the

Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health



at

All Saints Church
100 Prince of Wales Drive
Battersea
London SW11 4BD
between 13.00 and 17.00

PUT THE DATE IN YOUR DIARY
AND COME AND JOIN US