

NEXT SIG MEMBERS' PROGRAMME

'Special needs, special gifts - learning disability and spirituality'.

FRIDAY 21st OCTOBER 2005

Venue: Royal College of Psychiatrists
17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG

10.15 Coffee

10.45 **Preliminary Notices: Professor Andrew Sims (Chair)**

11.00 **'The spiritual lives of people with learning disabilities: why would we care?' Professor John Swinton**

12.30 **Lunch**

1.30 **'Walk with me: a young woman's journey through bereavement' Cristina Gangemi**

3.0 **Tea**

3.15 **'In dependent bodies: exploring a Christian understanding of disability' Fr Adrian McKenna**

4.45 **Plenary**

5.00 **Close**

Programme Information:

Professor John Swinton

'The spiritual lives of people with learning disabilities: why would we care?'

Professor Swinton holds the chair in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom and is also an honorary Professor at Aberdeen's Centre for Advanced Studies in Nursing. He worked as a registered nurse specializing in psychiatry and learning disabilities and for a number of years as a community mental health chaplain. His areas of research include the relationship between spirituality and health and the theology and spirituality of disability. In 2004 Professor Swinton went on to found the *Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability* at the University of Aberdeen, a multidisciplinary project that aims to enable researchers, practitioner and educators to work together to develop innovative and creative research projects and teaching initiatives. He is the author of various journal articles and books including 'Spirituality and Mental Health Care' (Jessica Kingsley 2001).

Cristina Gangemi

‘Walk with me: a young woman's journey through bereavement’

Cristina Gangemi has a Masters degree in Pastoral Theology and works with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark as co-ordinator of an exciting project *The Community Development Project for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities into the Life and Mission of the Church* which aims to develop a culture of inclusion in every parish and every school throughout the diocese. Her role entails providing training for Clergy and lay people to ensure that parishes are places of welcome and that all activities are differentiated in a way that will meet the needs of those with disabilities. Other duties include providing consultation to other diocese and faith communities.

This presentation will focus upon the journey of a young woman in one such parish whose mother was dying. Cristina Gangemi will be presenting the programme of bereavement that she created to support her spiritually during this time. She will discuss the possibilities for spiritual growth and psychological well-being that the programme presented, exploring both the positive and negative outcomes, and hopes that this meeting will afford an opportunity to discover how the medical, social and religious world can work together for the well-being and growth of people who have learning disabilities.

Fr. Adrian McKenna

‘In Dependent Bodies: Exploring a Christian Understanding of Disability’

Fr. McKenna is a priest for the Archdiocese of Southwark who worked in the NHS for eleven years as a Registered Nurse. He specialised in Community Nursing and multi-disciplinary teamwork, gaining a Graduate Diploma in District Nursing and a Master of Science degree in Nursing (Inter-Professional Health and Welfare Studies). This focus on multi-disciplinary teamwork, allied to an understanding of the physical, psychological and spiritual needs of patients that underpins such care, eventually led to Fr. McKenna's study of philosophy and theology and his ordination to priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church.

Fr. McKenna has worked in chaplaincy care for children and young adults with disabilities, prompting a desire to understand how people living with disabilities have experienced the Christian Church, and how the Church has responded. To try to develop such an understanding, he completed a dissertation as part of his theological studies entitled, ‘In Dependent Bodies: Moving from a Theology of Disability to a Recognition of Interdependence.’ Fr. McKenna's presentation gives an overview of his dissertation, looking first at the prevalence and societal implications of disability, and then at the image of disability within the Scripture and Tradition of the Christian Church. By reflecting on how such images have helped to shape the theology and pastoral care of the Church, he emphasises the move that has occurred away from any theology that helps to isolate those with disability, towards an inclusive understanding of the Church, which values the dignity and diversity of all.