

# ACC National Conference 2022

It was wonderful to see so many of our members, non-members and trainers at the National Conference in October. After three years of planning and two cancellations, it was with great relief that the gathering finally happened. We had an amazing group of trainers and speakers present, covering such a wide variety of topics for

both counsellors and pastoral carers.

## THE THEME

As many of you are aware, the theme of the conference was taken from Galatians 3:28: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is

no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'. Throughout the conference, I said several times that this verse sums up the *outrageously inclusive nature of God*. The thing about this verse, however, is that is easy to say and it is beautiful to read, but I think we are all aware that *inclusion in practice* is something requiring much commitment and challenge. I know that some of you who attended the conference in person were challenged, but for all of us, present or not, the message of inclusion will continue to be challenging.

## THE CHALLENGE

We were reminded by a couple of speakers that the privilege afforded to some of us simply by default of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, etc. means that whilst we may sincerely believe we are all equal ('one in Christ'), that is not necessarily the lived experience of many.

Why, though, is inclusion so challenging? I think it can be partly explained in this quote from Jane Silber, a business leader in technology companies:

*"The difference between diversity and inclusion is being invited to a house and being able to rearrange the furniture".*

If we are going to allow people to 'move the furniture', it means we actually have to start by becoming more aware of *why the furniture arrangement does not work for them*. We need to ask ourselves the questions, 'Does the furniture represent an inviting, comfortable environment, or a barrier?' 'Is it arranged to suit me and people like me or is it arranged to create/facilitate an accessible place for all?' Likewise, a corollary question, 'To what extent am I willing to have the furniture rearranged; to move out of my comfort zone?' It also means that we need to be



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willing to look at things through the lens of others and see what they see, hear what they hear and sense what they sense. This is not easy for any of us. It involves education, listening to life stories, and stepping into different worlds, changing our mindsets.

### THE CHANGES

When I worked in the banking world in the City, I was very involved in project-managing several implementations of regulatory and compliance changes, often as a consequence of some banking scandal. We would impose training, checks, new rules, etc. but at the heart of it all we knew that those impositions would only be effective if real cultural change occurred and that the real goal, therefore, had to be that 'we would all behave and practice in the right way, even if all the checks and rules were removed'. Ways of thinking and cultural norms would need to change (evolve), so that what we should do would no longer be something that needed to be pointed out, but would be (come) our natural default behaviour.

### THE (INADVERTENT) PITFALLS

It seems to me that when it comes to matters of inclusion, most of us are still at the stage where we need things to be pointed out. We do not naturally see through the lens

of others. To our embarrassment, this very point became obvious at the opening meeting of the conference. We got into the venue with not much time to set up, checked the presentation, the music, the microphones, etc., but what did we not check? How wide the aisles were for wheelchair users and whether there was space for them so that they would be able to see the screens, when everyone else stood up! A mistake? Yes, granted, and a genuine one at that, but a bad one that made the opening meeting not accessible

for everyone. Why did it happen? I think simply because our mindset was not geared towards looking at a venue through the eyes of others. We did not see (quite literally, in this case) what needed to be moved.

### THE CONCLUSION AND THE ONGOING JOURNEY

Certainly, as ACC Chair, the conference challenged me on a personal level, and I am aware that as an organisation we have much to address regarding inclusivity. We are on a journey and we therefore positively welcome any information and advice in terms of ideas about how we can be more inclusive. Similarly, as individual counsellors, pastoral carers or organisations offering these services, we invite you to think about inclusivity in your practices, churches, organisations, etc. (Articles on these themes are warmly invited – Ed.)

### ONE IN CHRIST

At the conference, there were several unconventional images of Jesus on display and people were invited to reflect on them to see how they could challenge, inspire,



*This picture is reproduced by kind courtesy of the artist, Reverend Alan Stewart*

and inform faith. One was called 'The Blind Jesus' (see below). It is an image of the Last Supper by Rev Alan Stewart, which includes the central character of a blind Jesus, surrounded by twelve people of differing ages, backgrounds, races, abilities, etc. It was commissioned by Celia Webster, Co-Founder of Wave (We're All Valued Equally), as part of a project in which schools, churches and community groups are encouraged to create and display their own Last Supper images.

*Revd John Beauchamp, London Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler for the Church of England, writes that 'In this Last Supper, the marginalised and excluded and devalued are invited to the table. Invited to be with Jesus. To sit and eat with him. To find themselves with him and recognise themselves in him. To find that their embodiment is not a barrier but in fact their passport into the kingdom where all of our human diversity is redeemed and celebrated in a riot of joy and celebration'.*

More information can be found at: [https://www.hertfordstandrews.co.uk/Groups/379600/Hertford\\_St\\_Andrews/Faith/Blind\\_Jesus/Blind\\_Jesus.aspx](https://www.hertfordstandrews.co.uk/Groups/379600/Hertford_St_Andrews/Faith/Blind_Jesus/Blind_Jesus.aspx)

Personally, I have found this to be a great reflective/devotional tool, asking myself 'Who do I need to invite?' 'Who may I currently be excluding, even if unintentionally?' 'What do I need to change to enable people to actually attend?' Being invited is one thing, being comfortable and able to attend is another. You may want to use the picture in a similar way – personally, professionally and/or organisationally.

### CARING BY NAME AND NATURE

In addition to challenge, the conference was (we hope) also a place of **CARE**: **C**onnecting, **A**ccompanying, **R**esourcing and **E**ngaging. We have started to adopt this acronym in order to describe the work of ACC in terms of how we support members, work with other organisations and provide a service to the public. We think it describes what has been the work of ACC over the last 30 years, as we move into the future. ACC is 30 years old this year and we want to celebrate the work of the thousands of members who have contributed in this work during that time. We also want to pray for future days, that we will be an organisation where everyone can really feel that all are 'one in Christ'.

**Our prayers for you all as we enter 2023 are summed up in the words used at the conclusion of the conference:**

*Searching God,*

*To you no one is lost.*

*No one is left behind*

*No one is the price to be paid for the greater good.*

*Give us the same restless desire,*

*The same fierce joy*

*Which finds grace in every child of earth and makes a community open to all.*

*We ask this in the name of Jesus,*

*Who loved the world and did not count the cost. Amen.*

*Dear Lord,*

*We pray for your anointing for the work of Christians in counselling and pastoral care.*

*We pray that all will have renewed hearts for the healing work you have set before us.*

*May you protect and equip us to shine your light in all our encounters with others enacting your sacred unity of love for all people. Amen.*

With every blessing,

Sue Monckton-Rickett

Chair of ACC.



## A story-time celebration!

By way of celebrating the thirty years of ACC to which Sue refers in this article, she and Kathy Spooner would be delighted to receive personal stories about the impact ACC has made in the lives of individuals over those three decades. Could you contribute to this?