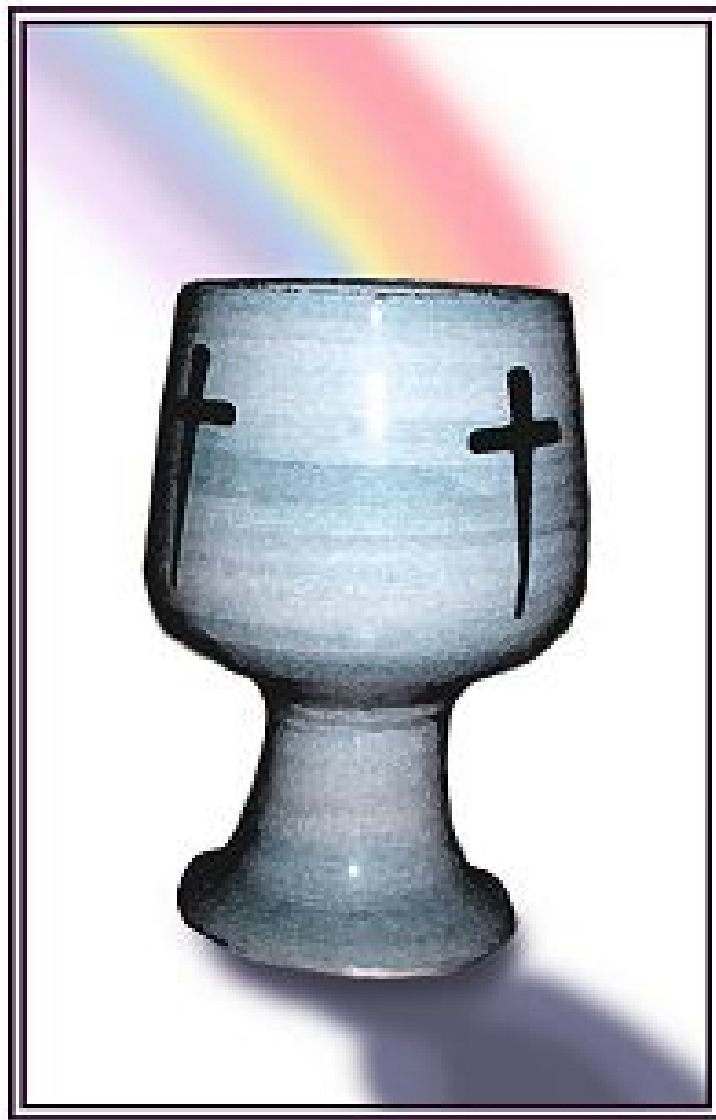


Drinking The Cup

A journey through cancer



By

Melanie Groundsell

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INTRODUCTION

I think I always knew deep down that one day I would succumb to cancer. I hadn't, though, expected it to be so soon, or quite as dramatic. My middle sister had died of rhabdomyosarcoma (a tumour of the muscle) when she was sixteen, and my mother had died of ovarian cancer at the age of fifty three. As a result, most of my childhood and early adult years were spent in various hospitals sampling different oncology units, and rapidly getting to know the cancer treatments and their side effects. Although aged only ten, I can remember my sister enduring chemotherapy, a comparatively new treatment at the time, and seeing her coping with nausea through the night. My mother's cancer was diagnosed at a late stage, and so the treatment for her was quite different. Even so, as a young adult of twenty one I watched in horror at the debilitating effects of the disease, and at the limited impact the variety of chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments seemed to have on the inevitable progress of the cancer.

With this background in mind, when I reached my thirties, I started investigating screening for ovarian cancer. A friend passed on details from a magazine about a screening programme that was being set up. It transpired, after I had been to my

GP, that the screening was only available for those with two close relatives with breast or ovarian cancer. My relatives are few and far between, and as far as I knew, none of them, apart from my mother, had been diagnosed with either of these types of cancer. My GP tried to reassure me, saying that it was an 'older person's disease'. I attempted to take her words to heart, and to get on with my life as normal.

Life for me had always been frantic. Working full time as a librarian in the local public library seemed to take a great deal of energy. Things had become even more complex when, after eight years of part time study for a theology degree, I decided to test out my vocation to ordained ministry. After a lengthy selection process I was recommended for training. I was of course delighted, although overawed at the change that this would bring to my life, and to the lives of those around me. I decided to take a year out before I started training - a belated 'gap year', and on the Bishop's advice was placed in a local parish so that I could experience the inner workings of parish life before I started at college. This is where my cancer journey started.