

Fed up of going it alone?



Katharine Gray, National Director of Friends First

Integrity and optimism

Sometimes the search for Mr or Miss Right feels like hunting for a needle in a haystack, especially when our lives are full of people (colleagues, friends and acquaintances) but void of that special, loving relationship which ‘touches the soul.’ Sadly, many single teachers admit that they have long since given up on trying to find a potential partner in today’s ‘time poor’ society.

But finding a potential husband or wife is not merely about spending quality time with people. It is about meeting people of special quality – defined by certain attributes such as integrity and a basic optimism about life. Most people want to form meaningful relationships with other people, and for Christians meeting like-minded fellow believers can be very important.

Every person is unique

Friends First is an information service for single Christians across the UK, run exclusively by Christians for Christians (ie people who associate themselves with a mainstream Christian denomination). It provides single Christians with details about other single Christians of the opposite sex, and welcomes people from a wide variety of backgrounds and traditions. Friends First is a friendly and professionally-run service, which holds that every person is unique and cannot be categorised by a set of tick-boxes (music to any teacher’s ears!).

Thank you for supplying God with a vehicle in which people can meet friends and partners

Friends First is not a dating agency. Its non-pushy approach is born from the scriptural definition of love: *Love is gentle, and is kind* | Corinthians 13.

Love and marriage

To date, twenty-five Friends First couples have married, including many who work in the teaching profession. And, refreshingly, it is not just young single teachers who find their soul-mate either. Jo,

At Friends First we are aware of how difficult it can be for busy professionals to meet the right person

aged 42, wrote to Friends First saying: ‘After my painful divorce I felt that I would be doomed to a life alone, and then heard about Friends First and have not looked back since. I am now married to someone I met through Friends First. A life of singleness after being married was very daunting so I thank God enormously for this service. God provided a way for me, and I give him the glory.’

Friendship comes first

Katharine Gray, National Director for Friends First, says she is able to draw on her understanding of the unique pressures and circumstances faced by Christians in the teaching profession because she shares her house with a teacher and has many other friends who are teachers too. She says, ‘At Friends First we are aware of how difficult it can be for busy professionals to meet the right person. We also understand how nerve-racking it can be to join such an organisation. However, everyone is assured a warm welcome from helpful and friendly

Friends First offers a service that puts members in control and avoids the embarrassment of interviews and blind dates

staff. After all, single people have nothing to lose and everything to gain.'

Health Care Adviser Charles and GP Andrea were both in their 30s when they joined Friends First. She had been praying about a husband for a while – and when they met for the first time for lunch, he knew immediately that 'she was the one!' After six months Charles proposed, by which time Andrea's decision to say 'Yes' was an easy one.

Katharine comments, 'I get lots of positive feedback from people finding great joy in making new friends.'

Peter, aged 40, found his life had been touched in this way. He said, 'I believe I have met my soul mate through your agency. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for supplying God with a vehicle in which people can meet friends and partners. It is such an important service, and I am certain God will continue to bless it. Once again, thank you.'

No pressure

Friends First operates simply. Members write a concise summary of themselves, which is circulated to other members, of the right age. Contact is made through box numbers, administered by Friends First, to assure confidentiality.

There is no match-making as such. People are free to make their own selections based on the information provided to them through the continually



The advertisement features a black background on the left with the 'ff' logo and 'friendsfirst' text. The right side has a white background with the text: 'Hoping... to be in a relationship?', 'Seeking... someone who shares your faith?', and 'Finding... it difficult to meet the right person?'. Below this, it states: 'Then Friends First could be the answer – a proven way to meet Christian friends and potential partners. Friends First offers a discreet service which puts you in control.' At the bottom, contact information is provided: 'PO Box 8377 Birmingham B17 9TE', 'info@friends1st.co.uk', 'www.friends1st.co.uk', and '0121 427 1286'.

Friends first

Elaine Storkey et al

Believe it or not, Elaine Storkey (esteemed Christian theologian and sociologist) was instrumental in getting Friends First started. Katharine Gray, National Director of Friends First, reminisces: 'Basically, the idea came from the Saint John's Church (Harborne, Birmingham) weekend away in 1999. Elaine Storkey, the invited speaker on that occasion, challenged the church to do more to help people find Christian friends of the opposite sex as well as partners.'

Thus Friends First was established with the active support of Christian leaders in Birmingham including: Bishop Jo Aldred (Executive Director of The Centre for

Black and White Christian Partnership), The Reverend Canon John Hughes (St John's, Harborne), The Reverend James Langstaff, and Reverend Brian Nicholls (General Superintendent of the West Midlands Area of the Baptist Union of Great Britain).

Over the last five years Friends First has grown rapidly and now offers a nationwide service which has the backing of many clergy across the country.

Friends First can be contacted at:
PO Box 8377, Birmingham, B17 9TE

T: 0121 4271286
E: info@friends1st.co.uk
W: www.friends1st.co.uk

updated profiles. Friends First offers a service that puts members in control and avoids the embarrassment of interviews and blind dates. There is no pressure. Members have the choice how and when to take things forward, as and when they feel comfortable doing so.

Friends First also offers holidays and activities, for those who want to do something active, but not on their own, and wish to meet other single Christians who share their interests.

Security

For all members, and especially those who work in the public domain, confidentiality is important. Friends First prides itself on being a confidential and secure service where personal details such as addresses are not disclosed and where contact from the organisation, to its members, is always extremely discreet.

■ Sally Greene