

Christian? Single? Stuck in the staffroom?



Home alone

Finding that special friend or potential marriage partner has never been easy.

For Christian members of the teaching profession it can be especially difficult. If you are a woman working in a primary school most of your colleagues will probably also be women. If you are a man teaching in a boys' school most of your colleagues will be other men. And of course – unless you are in a church school – it's unlikely that many of your colleagues will share your faith. Even then, there are no guarantees.

Getting a life outside school is easier said than done. In a word: workload. Teaching is rarely conducive to a vibrant social-life during term time. Endless preparation, mountains of marking, records to keep, and forms to file all add up to stress and... the perpetuation of singleness.

For Christians there are always church and charitable activities to take part in. But during those long summer holidays even churches 'go quiet'. If you don't organise well in advance to go away with other single friends – especially as you get older – you can find yourself spending more time than you would like on your own.

'friendsfirst is meeting a real need. It takes the pressure off couples and allows them to meet one another in a more relaxed way. I am very encouraged by the response there has been to friendsfirst.'

Reverend Canon John Hughes from Birmingham



Jo Siedlecka trained to be a teacher at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham. After teaching English for several years in Japan and England she went back to college to study journalism at the London College of Printing. She has worked as a news reporter and feature writer for the national and local press, press officer to the Catholic Bishops Conference, recently contributed to *Woman's Hour*, *BBC News Online*, and *Pause For Thought* and occasionally teaches Journalism at the City of London University.

If this describes you – don't feel you are the only one in this situation. According to a recent government survey, in London around 40 per cent of people live alone.

These days however, very few Christian school-teachers end their days as a spinster schoolmarm or a dedicated Mr Chips! Christian members of the teaching profession are getting married just as much as everyone else.

Modern methods

But in this twenty-first century, more and more Christians are turning to more modern methods to assist them in their quest for a life partner.

One organisation which provides a personal, confidential service, matching Christians of all ages and denominations to each other, is *friendsfirst*. Based in the heart of England, the agency has been very successful since it started six years ago. It has been contacted by its 10,500th enquirer and has been responsible for 40 marriages in the last six years – maybe more!

While clients come from many different professions, a considerable number are teachers, and several have found marriage partners through the agency.

Diana, an Anglican primary school teacher who lives in Stoke on Trent, met IT teacher Paul through *friendsfirst*. They are planning to marry later this year.

Diana said, 'I felt I was leading a very full life. I enjoyed sports and travel. I had lots of good friends, and I was really involved in my church. But after my 35th birthday it began to dawn on me

that I hadn't actually been on a proper "date" for a couple of years. Friends and relatives were getting married and having children and I started to feel I should try to be a bit more proactive about things. I prayed about it for a while and talked with friends. Then I joined friendsfirst, on the advice of someone else who had been with them. I must say, since then my social life has really taken off.'

She continues, 'I started by just writing to people or talking on the phone. Then I went out with a couple of men. Both had completely different jobs to me. They were both thoughtful and interesting and I think I will certainly stay friends with one of them. My third date was with Paul and we really got on very well from the start. He lives in Birmingham – not that far away – but our paths would never have crossed if it hadn't been for friendsfirst.'

Paul, who is 42 and from Manchester, reflected, 'My wife died eight years ago and it took a long time for me to get back on my feet. I changed jobs and moved to Birmingham. My 12-year-old son Sam and I just did everything together like two messy bachelors and to be honest it wasn't good for either of us. It was Sam who suggested I join friendsfirst. He said I was getting "really boring". Diane and I got together round the same time he started at secondary school and it feels like we are all entering a new chapter in our lives.'

Both Diane and Paul now say that without a doubt they have found their best friend and soul mate. They haven't looked back since meeting each other

'10% of friendsfirst members are teachers – they benefit from a service that is professional, confidential, personal and very friendly. Our clients are at the heart of everything we do and we know they appreciate the support they get from us; many new members join because of a personal recommendation from a colleague, friend or family member who has already found a new friend or marriage partner through friendsfirst.'

Katharine Gray, Director of friendsfirst

For more information or to obtain a brochure please contact friendsfirst at:

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

ACT Now readers who are interested in joining friendsfirst can obtain a special 15% discount if they join before 31 October 2006. Just add the code ACT-FF to your application form to save money.

and are very excited about their future together. Diane enthuses, 'Although I really love my job, I was increasingly aware that something was missing in my life. Now having found Paul, I know what it was. If I hadn't taken the initiative to join friendsfirst, I would probably still be here on my own, feeling lonely and wondering how on earth I was going to change my situation. I'm so glad I did take the step and signed up as a friendsfirst member.'

We all know that it can be really hard to find the time to make changes in our lives. If you recognise the pressures on your time, and know that in all likelihood you are not going to start lots of new activities just to meet someone new and special, then joining an organisation like friendsfirst really does make sense. Many teachers of all ages have taken this step and found it's benefited them. It could well work for you too.

■ Jo Siedlecka



Happy matches made through friendsfirst (clockwise from left): Brian and Ruth married April 2005; Bernard and Bev married August 2004; Hayley and Chris (both teachers) married August 2002