



Risking everything for God!

THESE ARE days when God is calling the church to take greater risks for Him.

The risk of abandoning our plans, careers and ambitions for the higher cause of serving Jesus. The risk of loving others more deeply and powerfully with all we've got, however painful and sacrificial that may be. The risk of getting out to the places where the people are hungering after God, meeting their needs and healing their wounds. The risk of

being out front and in the firing line for the sake of the kingdom of God.

In such a climate the gift of celibacy is finding its place. Undivided, unattached and undiluted men and women are those who will best fulfil God's work in our day.

Many of these will choose to be single - sometimes for a period of time - so they can be sold out for Jesus, releasing a strong stream of love and energy into our nation.

Dare to deny self

"SEXUAL abstinence could be the new radicalism of the 90's, since giving up money or homes for God is passé... seeing the spectacle of extravagantly wasting what to this generation is more sought after than perfume."

(J.Duin: Sex and the Single Christian)

Commitment

"WHEN I made a commitment to celibacy I let go other choices. We forge our future by a commitment. Trying to keep all options open, we realise none of them."

(B.McKenna: Miracles Do Happen)

Rivers of colour

A vivid picture from God convinced Jane that He was offering her something very special

I SUPPOSE, like most young Christians, it seemed to me the norm to be married and have a family. But one day, I picked up the Jesus Fellowship 'Flame' leaflet* called 'Single for the Lord' and was inspired.

Just as I was reading the leaflet a celibate sister came up and talked to me. Something she said stuck in my mind - that celibacy is a gift given to the church.

This reassured me that staying single for the Lord might be possible. Over the year that I had lived in Christian community I had met people who were single for Jesus and found that they had something real about them and were not 'wishy washy', 'on the shelf' people.

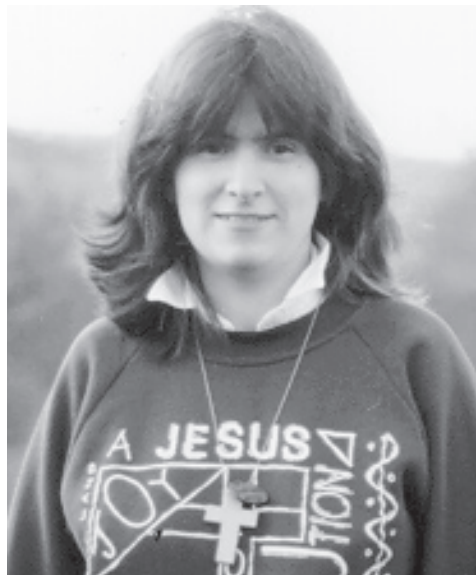
One day I was walking out in the orchard near to the house where I live when I suddenly acknowledged that the Lord was offering celibacy to me.

I knew He had been holding this gift out to me for a long time before, but I had never recognised it. I found myself saying, 'Oh, well, there's no time like the present!'

At that moment the Lord gave me the most beautiful wisdom picture (an impression in the Holy Spirit). It was so vivid that it has been a point of reference and inspiration ever since.

It was as if He stretched out His hand and in it was a beautifully wrapped box, tied with a ribbon. I pulled the ribbon and out flowed these amazing colours - rivers of colour and life. As I held the box in my hand, the colours oozed through my fingers and I knew this was the colour and life of celibacy.

God had given me the gift and shown me its beauty. That evening an elder in our church



Jane: Found something special in celibacy

household sang a song which was very fitting: 'I've seen a whole lot of colour shining glistening in my face, I'm so glad to be part of the new creation race.'

Soon afterwards I really gave myself to Jesus as a celibate once and for all. It was as if I was floating on a river boat of easy life and I needed to throw myself off the side into the

river, not knowing what was there. Many had told me that celibacy was a wonderful gift, but their word was not enough. God had to show me Himself and prove it to me. So I trusted Him and 'jumped'. Since then I have not doubted His call.

Being celibate makes me feel extra special, that the Lord sees me as His. I am proud to be single for Jesus and to have Him as my husband, lover and Lord - He's great!

* One of a series of 'Flame' leaflets on many Christian topics available free from Jesus Fellowship

"As I held the box in my hand, the colours oozed through my fingers and I knew this was the colour and life of celibacy"

A married Christian says celibates are the best lovers of God

"THE DEPTH of the celibate's passion for God casts aside all frustration and loneliness and creates a bond of pure joy.

Celibacy redirects the happiness-seeking tendency in man to its divinely appointed purpose of loving God. Celibates desire to love the greatest person of all - the Creator Himself.

Only God can satisfy the potential for love that He has given to man. The beautiful flowering of this divine love in a person's life is the greatest thing one could ever hope for."

a r i e s o n l y

Celibacy and the Jesus Fellowship

CELIBACY is a gift and calling spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 19:12) and recommended by Paul (1 Corinthians 7:25-35). Around 300 men and women in the Jesus Fellowship nationwide have made the choice of staying single.

It applies to single parents, the divorced, widows and widowers as well as single people.

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Pathfinders!

A regular series on past celibate heroes and heroines

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

1182-1226

SON OF A wealthy cloth merchant, Francis of Assisi (a town in northern Italy) grew up rich, well-dressed and spoiled. A talented musician, with a sociable character, he was a born leader.

One night he received a revelation from God that was to change his life. When out drinking with his friends, he suddenly had this awareness of Christ giving up everything and choosing to be poor because He loved all men and would not own anything that they did not. He saw that to be like the poor was to be like Christ. In his own words, he had "fallen in love with a bride richer and more beautiful than anyone can imagine, called Lady Poverty."

Renounces riches

Soon afterwards, he disrobed publicly to renounce his life as a rich young man and became a homeless beggar. He dressed in a labourer's cast off tunic and breeches and vowed never to own money or possessions again.

He set off, inspired by Christ's words to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Matthew 10:8). Travelling barefoot along the stony roads and begging for scraps of food, he called himself "Il Poverello" (the poor man).

A powerful preacher and a great winner of friends, he soon gathered a group of varied fol-

lowers around him. They began calling themselves the Friars Minor (the Lesser Brothers), free to wander, serve and preach the gospel. Francis wrote out a basic rule insisting on absolute poverty with a vision of helping the outcasts of society.

A wealthy local woman, Clare, also wanted to join his work and established a new order of sisters who became known as the "Poor Clares". They stayed in a convent and their work consisted of growing food, praying, spinning and weaving cloth, making the distinctive habits for the brothers. They also had a hospital to care for the sick poor people.

Within 10 years there were 5000 enrolled in the order from France, Germany, Spain and England as well as Italy. Francis especially loved God's creation, calling all things 'brother' or 'sister'. All God's works gave praise to Him. He even journeyed to the Moslem Sultan in Egypt during the Crusades with a message of love and peace and was allowed to visit the Holy Land.

Franciscan order

In later years, his health declined and his original vision was replaced with a new rule establishing a Franciscan Order, protected by the Pope. He died soon after this.

According to his close brother, Leo, Francis "continually lived on the mountain of celibacy". He was devoted to Jesus with a passionate and sacrificial love that caused him to renounce everything for the sake of the Lord. As he himself

said: "Above all graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ gives to His friends is that of conquering oneself and willingly enduring sufferings, insults, humiliations and hardships for the love of Christ."



No home here

"CELIBACY has its native country in heaven. Here below it is like a stranger: in heaven it is at home."

(Ambrose, 4th Century)

Affections too

"BECOMING a celibate is not a cold choice of the will, but a response to God who is attracting the whole being - the affections as well as the intellect. Yet there will undoubtedly be suffering."

(Sister Madeleine OSA: Solitary Refinement)

Single, but not alone

"CELIBACY is ultimately for the sake of God's people and for the building up of the community of faith. Of its nature, celibacy is not meant to be lived in private. It is a call to relationship."

(C. Gallagher and T. Vandenberg: The Celibacy Myth)

Freedom

"THE WONDERFUL thing about celibacy is the freedom of heart it can offer...it liberates the individual for tasks which demand that total gift of self which is beyond any price."

(Y. Raguin: Celibacy for Our Time)

SINGLE STATISTICS:

● More than 1 in 3 British adults are single, pushing the singles population to over 18 million

● The number of women under 30 who have never married has reached 3.8 million - 12% rise in 10 years

● Whereas in 1961 only 3.9% of the population lived alone, by 1991 this had risen to 10.7%

● There are 6 million single-person households in Britain and it is predicted that there will be 8 million by the year 2000

● In 1951, 1 in 10 people were single; in 1991 1 in 4 were single

● By 2001 in the UK 44% of the adult population will be single

Churches in the UK must seek to meet the needs of growing numbers of single people in their congregations, some of whom will desire to commit themselves to lifelong celibacy.

Celibacy is a gift-

- ◆ for the sake of the kingdom involving full 'dying to self'
- ◆ which carries a clarity of seeing the things of God
- ◆ full of many trials and testings
- ◆ which is in the full flow of the stream of the river of the Spirit and the people of God, very central to God's purposes in this day of revival power
- ◆ of closeness to the brethren, full of nobility and kingliness
- ◆ of spiritual blessings and holy intoxication knowing victory, celebration and jubilation!
- ◆ which brings self-control and the purity of self-acceptance, contentment and peace
- ◆ entered into through humility
- ◆ which joins us to the Lord's radical army
- ◆ of seeing, knowing and loving Jesus in His glorious kingdom

-penned by a brother in the Jesus Fellowship