



Late call for Spiritual Gran

God used an unusual dream to point Maria in an unlikely direction!

MARIA JONES, now 66, first responded to God's call to celibacy in her fifties. Celibacy has, for her, been an exciting God-given opportunity after the heart-rending disappointment of three broken relationships.

As she grew up, Maria got into partying and boyfriends and first married when she was eighteen. The marriage ended when her husband, an ex-American service man, upped and left to go home. When she married another service man a few years later, the same thing happened. Later, a third marriage ended when Maria's new husband did not get on with her children, now numbering seven.

Then, out of the blue, her eldest daughter met the Jesus Army in Great Yarmouth. Maria went to meet her daughter's new friends and later visited New Creation Farm in Northamptonshire. It turned out to be everything Maria didn't want in life at her age – a house full of boisterous lads and very little peace – but Maria, a lively person herself, found herself irresistibly drawn and, at the age of fifty-one, moved into the Jesus Fellowship's New Creation Farm.

After her experiences, Maria decided she did not want to get married again but, one thing she knew for sure, she did not want to become a celibate. Then, once again, the unexpected happened as God spoke to her in a dream: "I was in a lovely green field and was lying on a stone altar. I didn't know why I was there but I was happy about it and when I woke up I didn't want to get off." "Surely God is trying to speak to me through the dream – but what on earth about?" She thought.

A few months later she felt the answer come. "I went into the lounge at the Farm for five minutes to pray. All of a sudden the love of God came down upon me. I thought - 'I want to be a celibate now!'" The penny dropped. Maria sensed that God was calling her to live her life as a celibate, a sacrifice indeed - but a sacrifice that He intended her to enjoy!



Maria: 'free and uncluttered' as a celibate

A few months later, Maria made a vow to God to be celibate for the rest of her life, something she described as "a personal thing between me and God and very precious." Maria has seven children, sixteen grandchildren and one great grandchild but, at the Farm, she soon found herself a mum again – this time to spiritual children. She found herself, not only doing the washing for a large family but also having a ready ear and praying for the many needs around her.

"Most churches are full of old people like me," she said. "It's great to be in a church with so many young people. I pray for them a lot. I love to see them moving on with God! They just need keeping on the right track. I'm a spiritual Gran, especially to the lads - when I look after them and chat to them and hear their problems. When you see spiritual babies come to birth and grow it is very much like watching your own children doing something new."

As a celibate, Maria finds herself particularly available to meet the needs of such a family. "I'd never be anywhere else," said Maria. "There is never a dull moment here!" After making a vow of celibacy too, Maria found her gifts of wisdom, prophecy and intercession became sharper. She also described how she 'felt free and uncluttered with a much deeper walk with God and deeper relationships with others – especially celibates.'

"What we would have for ourselves is not what God would always chose for us!" Maria said cheerfully as she reflected on her unusual way of life and her call to celibacy later in life. "I'm free, fulfilled, happy in what I'm doing. Any other way of life would be boring compared to this."

'All of a sudden the love of God came down upon me'

A sacrificial life

I WAS recently inspired by an account of the life of Mildred Cable, missionary to China. Undeterred by the slaughter of foreign missionaries and tens of thousands of Chinese Christians in the Boxer rebellion of 1900, the fearless 22 year-old couldn't wait to set sail for China! As a result of this decision, her fiancé - a fellow candidate at missionary school - broke off their engagement. Her response to his letter was typical of the resolution and sacrificial commitment that marked the next 55 years of fruitful, celibate service to the Lord:

"On a beautiful May morning, when the lilac was in bloom, there was put into my hands a letter in which was written that which made a goblin of the sun. Unless I was to deny my vocation, I must pursue my pathway alone. In one hour the highest things of life burned themselves to ashes."

By pursuing this pathway she achieved a remarkable success, seeing the church grow in China from less than 100,000 to 366,000 with over 300 mission stations established - until she was finally expelled in 1936.

Celibacy was a vital ingredient in her work as she endured extreme hardships and suffering. In the midst of her work of educating the illiterate, rescuing abandoned babies and young girls forced into prostitution, feeding the poorest of the poor, healing the sick and caring for orphans, she found a joy of serving her God. In her own words, "For Christ's sake, it is worth it a thousand times over."

Such examples are a constant reminder of the power of lives undividedly devoted to Jesus and His work.

Huw Lewis

A brotherhood of reconciliation

SWISS BORN Roger Schutz, now eighty-six, has been at the heart of what has been called "one of the most extraordinary Christian revivals the West has witnessed in the modern era." (*The Times*: Dec 22, 2000)

His father was a Protestant pastor and Roger grew up a visionary young man with a heart for others, inheriting from his Christian grandmother a strong desire to help destitute and homeless people. While a theological student in Switzerland, he felt, too, the need of some sort of traditional monastic life within Protestantism, centred on community, celibacy and prayer.

The face of Europe changed with the outbreak of war in 1939 as streams of refugees fled to land as yet unoccupied by the Germans. Brother Roger, as he is now called, set off from his home in Geneva by bicycle, looking for a house where he could pray and offer a haven for refugees.

He found a house for sale in Taizé, in eastern France, where he met an old woman who said to him

"Stay here - we are so isolated." For him, it was like the voice of God speaking to him through the voice of a poor woman. He had never heard words like this in any of the other places he had visited.

Refugees, particularly Jews fleeing the Nazis, quickly started arriving. On 11 and 12 November 1942, the whole of France was occupied by the invading armies and the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police, came twice to search the house, looking for the people Brother Roger was hiding. At that moment Brother Roger was in Switzerland, where he was forced to remain until the end of 1944.

When Brother Roger returned to Taizé in

1944, several others who shared his vision accompanied him. They formed themselves into a brotherhood and, in 1949, seven of them vowed to remain celibate and to share all they had in community.

In 1952 Brother Roger, as leader of the community, wrote a rule of life for his brothers called the 'Rule of Taizé'. It has very similar values to the traditional monastic orders - rules of poverty, obedience and celibacy. For the brothers of Taizé, celibacy involves the re-channelling of natural human love towards God and one's neighbour. The rule states: "our celibacy means neither breaking with human affections, nor indifference, but calls for the transfiguration of our natural love."

Today the Taizé community is made up of a hundred brothers from some twenty-five countries and continues to have, at its core, committed celibates. It is both ecumenical

and international and is committed to bringing reconciliation among Christians as well as heading a worldwide Christian youth renewal movement.

It is also a retreat centre and sends missionaries to poor areas in the West and the Developing World. Small groups of Taizé brothers live

in such areas where they try to share similar conditions with the people around them. Brother Roger, in particular, visits places of need such as Calcutta or drought-stricken countries such as Ethiopia. He has international links and at times visits heads of state in troubled places, in an effort to bring peace. He has received several awards for his efforts at peace and reconciliation and youth work.

Visit the Taizé web-site <http://www.taize.fr>

*The Gestapo came
twice to search the
home, looking for
the people Brother
Roger was hiding*

A DYNAMIC STATE

Celibacy is a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for a spiritual motive.

A.W. Richard Sipe

Inclusive friendship

Jesus remained single, but became a complete, whole, mature adult human being...He related to different people on different levels, but always His friendship was inclusive not exclusive.

Ruth Fowke

Yielding to the supreme God

The celibate has looked on other persons, other varieties of life and has deliberately rejected them, and yielded to God, because He is supreme.

Don Basham

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. They include single parents, the divorced, widows and widowers as well as single people of all ages and sexual orientations.

For info/help please contact:
Jesus Fellowship Central
Offices, Nether Heyford,
Northampton NN7 3LB, UK
Tel: (01327) 349991
www.jesus.org.uk
email: info@jesus.org.uk

© Jesus Fellowship 2002

Seven Silver Rings
Seven celibates from the Jesus Fellowship tell their stories



Seven Silver Rings

The accounts of seven
celibates from the
Jesus Fellowship who tell
their stories with passion,
humour and courage

Info: Jesus People Shop,
Nether Heyford,
Northampton NN7 3LB, UK Tel:
(01327) 349992
www.jesus.org.uk/books

80 pages. Price £2.99 (£3.50 by post).

A **multiply**
CHRISTIAN NETWORK
PUBLICATION

A MINISTRY
Let's SER BOOKS
to those seeking
to experience
being Christian