Friendship generates Faith

Richard Armstrong defines evangelism as an inter-active and relational ministry with people. He says: "Evangelism is reaching out to others in Christian love, identifying with them, caring for them, listening to them, and sharing one's faith with them, in such a way that they will freely respond and want to commit themselves to trust, love and obey God as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of His servant community."

The above statement is very close to my heart, as I can truthfully testify to its sentiments and value. Discovering evangelism is exciting, as God is inexhaustible in his blessings upon those who have the motivation, desire and heart to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in different ways.

As the church and community evangelist in Stockwood, Bristol, I cannot help but notice that Church buildings stand in and around most communities. If they stand isolated and adrift in a community, it is not only the bricks and mortar which convey separation, and even exclusion; it is also the people within the building who can distance themselves from the community around them. We must ask ourselves: *"How can the gospel message be shared and has Christianity anything to say and offer to the wider community?"*

My view is that God wishes all churches to be **inclusive** and this means widening their appeal beyond the faithful. My ministry among older people is teaching me that offering the heart and love of friendship can counter-act the divide, and even division, between church and community. Over the past four years and with many others, I have utilized the church premises to become a community resource. One volunteer remarked: *"I came back into the church family because I could see the church cared and is doing something visual, active and social in our community."*

A comment shared with me from a non-church goer who enjoys a leisure activity in the church hall was: *"These activities on offer really bring people together and where new friendships are made. I can see that God has his hand in this place!"*

People need to see that you care and that you are interested in them as individuals. This is often when people share and talk about life and spiritual concerns. The man who made the comment (above) and his wife are seriously thinking of attending our next Alpha group. Is social action possibly a forerunner to welcome people into the church and as they explore their own spiritual journey? I believe it is. I take this special brand of evangelism seriously as it allows God to move people and, hopefully, to bring them to know our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chris Crosskey

Chris Crosskey has recently compiled a booklet published by Church Army titled "Evangelism Made Easy - 88 ways for older people to enjoy their ministry!" It offers simple and practical models to inspire churches and communities to enjoy ministry. The models in the booklet were tried and tested and recommended by several evangelists from the Older People's Focus Group. Copies can be obtained from the Operations Office, Church Army, Marlowe House, 109 Station Road, Sidcup, DA15 7AD. Tel. 020 8309 3509. Donations gratefully accepted.

Prayer Request

Pray for all churches, everywhere, that they will embrace their immediate community in social action and they will be salt and light to everyone. Inspire us, O Lord, to value friendship and welcome 'all' into your Kingdom of love.