

## Reaching Out to Friends

*Edwin Godfrey*

When we go to church at All Saints, or attend any of any of its social events or committees, we tend to see a lot of familiar faces. These are the regular attenders, who are on the electoral roll and give their time and money to the church, the "hard core" of active parishioners, without whom All Saints could not survive.

Although it is nice to keep in regular touch with the people we have known through the church for years, we sometimes forget that they are only the centre of a much wider community of people associated with the church in all kinds of ways. All Saints Church is one of the major landmarks of Hertford, and people come to it for many different reasons, whether it is because of the quality of our music, the convenience of our large church building, the fundraising events which we hold or a special occasion or service which brings them into the church.

We need to reach out to this wider constituency for two main reasons.

First, it should be our ambition to serve the greatest possible number of people in the town and beyond it, and to grow our Christian community by including all men and women of goodwill, whether or not they are regular churchgoers.

Secondly, the financial burden of maintaining the church will probably in the long run be too great for the small numbers of people in the "hard core" to bear, unless we can tap into the fund of goodwill in the wider community to help with the financial support of the church.

For these reasons, we have been discussing in the Finance Committee the idea of forming a "Friends of All Saints" organisation. This is something which many other parishes do, but the form which it takes can be very flexible. For example, there could be an annual subscription, and benefits could include free delivery of the parish magazine and/or an annual social event with donated glasses of wine and a talk on some

relevant topic. Another idea might be regular money prize draws for subscribers, on the lines of the "Hundred Clubs" operated by other non-church organisations.

The target group for membership is very wide, and could include not just congregation members but those who attend Soundbites, our big annual festivals or coffee mornings, families who come for weddings and baptisms and those participating in special services for schools, scouts, Remembrance Day etc. It includes anyone interested in the church, either for its worship, for its music, for its architecture, for its role in marking special events in life or even just for its function as a familiar landmark in the town which should not be allowed to fail for lack of support.

In order to get this proposal off the ground, what we need is a small but enthusiastic group of two or three people who could work together to set up and run such an organisation. This would involve a certain amount of commitment in terms of time and energy, but on the positive side they would have complete flexibility in developing new ideas, they would be doing great things for the social and financial development of the church, and above all they should find it fun!

If anyone is interested in forming part of such a steering group for Friends of All Saints, please contact either Jo Loveridge or myself.

## Moving Mountains

"Moving Mountains" is the inspirational story of one woman's courage and devotion on the front line.

Claire Bertschinger, who received the United Nations International Human Rights and Nursing award in 2005, will be appearing at St Andrew's Church, Hertford on Saturday 13 June 2009 at 7.30 pm as part of its **Overcoming the Odds** Series,

demonstrating that you really can **Move Mountains** and make a difference if you put your heart to it.



The first part of the evening will be Claire telling part of her fascinating story. After an interval there will be an opportunity for the audience to ask questions and discuss the issues raised.

This is an event not to be missed as Claire Bertschinger rarely appears at such events as ours. Tickets priced at £10 and £7.50 for concessions are available from Hertford Tourist Information Office (01992 584322) or 01992 584426. Proceeds will be shared jointly for the Hall for Hertford project and Claire's continuing work for A-CET, the African Children's Educational Trust ([www.a-cet.org](http://www.a-cet.org)) which helps needy young Africans to develop their potential through education.

Claire Bertschinger has worked as an International Red Cross nurse in many war zones across the World including Ethiopia, Lebanon and Afghanistan. She now works at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Claire has been

awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Brunel University, the International Human Rights and Nursing Award, Woman of the Year Window to the World Award and Florence Nightingale Medal.

One of the most enduring images of the Ethiopian Famine that shocked the world in 1984 was that of the young international Red Cross nurse who, surrounded by thousands of starving people and with limited supplies, had the terrible task of choosing which children to feed and knowing that those she turned away might not last the night. That nurse was Claire Bertschinger, and those pictures inspired Live Aid, the biggest relief programme the world had ever seen.

*"In her was vested the power of life and death"* Bob Geldof said. *"She had become God-like, and that is unbearable for anyone."* Michael Buerk whose television reports first showed these pictures, persuaded Claire to return to Ethiopia almost twenty years later. For all those years she had been haunted by the memory of the terrible choices she had been forced to make. But when she met them again, the survivors welcomed her back with open arms, and called her *Mamma Claire*.

Born in Sheering, Essex, into an Anglo-Swiss family, Claire Bertschinger had to overcome the handicap of her dyslexia to qualify as a nurse. When she joined the International Committee of the Red Cross, she fulfilled a zest for adventure and a passionate vocation for relief work in dangerous places. She has worked with the war wounded and hostages in Lebanon, with the Mujahidin in Afghanistan, and with victims of civil war and displaced persons in Uganda, Sierra Leone and the Sudan. Working in the war zones, she often came under fire herself whilst trying to save the lives of others.

Her book "Moving Mountains" is a remarkable story of courage, commitment and compassion; the story of a resourceful woman who put her own life on hold in order to devote herself to others.