

Chris Bard ~ 29th February 1952 – 2nd September 2007

Address given at his funeral in Chelmsford Cathedral, Tuesday 18th September 2007

I count it a great honour to be asked by Mary, Ellen and Sarah to share with you some thoughts about Chris.

He's always been a lovely friend – but I have been humbled during these last two weeks to learn more about this very, very special Christian man. Anyone who knew him immediately recognised his boundless energy. His riotous humour. His deep devotion to his family and to his Lord.

But did you know that if you were ever stranded on a desert island, Chris would be the man to have alongside. ? You see, Chris was simply brilliant – a practical polymath. He knew how to grow and hunt food, was a brilliant cook, could build you wholesome accommodation, construct a boat and sail you to safety. He could mend anything – and had an outrageous collection of tools & equipment. He was a printer, a book-binder and he even gave cooking demonstrations: Chris loved people by cooking, and caring, and mending for them.

As for Music - it had always been critical in his life.

Do you remember years ago dancing to that famous Rock Group, Chris Bard's "Earthquake"? You missed something there! In fact, did you know, Chris always wanted to be a Rock Star - it's simply that God had was open to other possibilities.

For when Chris applied to King's College London to read Philosophy, a porter ushered him into the wrong interview room - by divine accident. Not till half way through the interview, did Chris realise he was in the theology department, with the Dean, Sydney Evans, asking him if he'd ever thought about ordination. "Well as a matter of fact I did once," said Chris. It was a fatal reply for the Dean immediately put his name on his list – and the rest is history!

It seems Chris was caught up in the Divine Comedy from the word go. For from that odd moment in the interview room Chris grew to become one of the most inspiring and committed priests you could hope to meet. Caring for his parishioners. Working with the BBC. And always with an openness that was disarming. And why? Because he knew God's love & generosity to be extravagantly beyond what any of us can fathom. Chris had learnt that God's generosity is revolutionary in its nature. He believed this intellectually but also in the deepest recesses of his being – He lived it to the full and never deviated from it. He sensed that for every human being he met, God has great plans.

This knowledge of God's inclusivity lead Chris to spearhead the final media campaign for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood. On the day of the knife-edge vote in General Synod, he worked tirelessly. Whichever way it went, all were under orders that the result was to be heard in solemn silence. The tension grew as the result was being declared, but Chris was seen to be rummaging under his seat with the bag he'd been carrying around all day. And from it he drew a big box of Belgian Celebration Chocolates and silently began handing them round. He had no doubts. In his mind, God's inclusive love would have to win through one day. So he'd come prepared. Chris was intrigued by the fact that even the biggest ocean liner could be turned around by the movement of a tiny rudder. "Keep it held over," he said, "and there comes a tipping point when the thing has to turn round."

So never be fooled into thinking there is nothing you can do, whatever the odds!

But having seen that vote won, his nature was to move swiftly on to engage with the next opportunity to see God's generosity shine through. Indeed his one foible was that he couldn't bear to think that he might miss a possibility. So he collected all sorts of bits to remind him of the projects that one day he must address. His attic was a Womble's paradise – piled to the brim with fresh possibilities for God's newness to break in on us. That crazy attic should be enshrined as a pilgrimage centre - a sign of God's immeasurable possibilities.

And the possibilities that Chris did engage with, seem endless.

He was repeatedly elected as Parish Councillor – even as Vice Chair. He was Chair of the Epping Green Community Association – spearheading the Door-Step Green project. He worked away on the Epping & Theydon Garnon Joint Charities – with their alms houses and all. Weekly assemblies at the local school he cherished so much, as Chair of Governors. And, he was a learned member of a number of model railway societies. Whatever interest or concern he had he would diligently find out all he could – and never jump to unwarranted conclusions. He was interested in ecology and gardening. So he studied for, and was awarded a distinction, in the RHS's professional diploma in horticulture.

Way ahead of his time, he was concerned how the Church was going to address the communications revolution, which he saw coming - so he went to the Open University and took a degree in the subject.

He diligently studied the other great faiths, and found real sustenance in some of their sacred texts.

He had an astronomical IQ, one of the highest recorded by MENSA, but that intelligence was put to good use because of his commitment to God's love and care for all creation.

He was chaplain to the Quiet Gardens Trust, and a long-term Trustee of the Conference and Retreat centres of High Leigh and Swanwick.

But amidst all this he was always full of Bubble & Squeak. Remember that roguish twinkle in his eye when he was hatching some new scheme What an infectious humour! It kept his BBC audience in stitches. One morning he was asked to read the weather forecast. His fellow presenter Janet spotted that he'd used quite a nautical tone of voice – He replied, "Oh, it's because all my friends are sailors." We've been pondering that remark ever since.

His well stocked mind was legendary. His family so loving and caring. His two beautiful parishes in which he took great delight But it wasn't all handed to Chris on a plate. As a matter of fact he had more than his fair share of challenges to struggle with day by day. But every morning without fail, he would be up at the crack of dawn, go into his special place, light a candle, and pray. For at the hub of his life was his faith - His faith in the Love of God, and his faith in the love of his family. Mary, Ellen and Sarah. Three very bright girls who were the bright light of Chris's life. He was so very proud of all three of you, and you knew just how special he was.

And his family have shared with me perhaps one of the most remarkable things about Chris. He never once was known by them to betray his principles. Never once. And first amongst those high principles was his non-judgemental Inclusivity.

His motto seems to have been: "Always leave a door wide open."

And in that way he changed people's minds – and changed their hearts. The way to change them, he said, is to know them and understand them. Try to see things from their side of the fence. And then, re-move the fence.

The BBC have been overwhelmed with hundreds of messages. May I end with just one which seems to typify so many. It reads: "Chris was a most special human being and a very special friend. He saw the potential in everyone and everything. He was a comedian, magician, singer, guitarist, a gardener, a prophet, as well as a vicar and broadcaster. But most of all a loving Christian who brought warmth, humour and light into our darkest places. - God bless you Chris."

My dear friends, in Chris, we have had the joy to know one of God's lovely saints.

AMEN.

+ *Laurie Green*