

# It's like a real family!

**Charlie Stevenson** started going to church after making a New Year's resolution

**Who are you?**

Charlie Stevenson, 37, a mum-of-two living in Fareham.

**Which church are you part of?**

St John's Church, Fareham

**Why did you start going there?**

It was New Year 2006, and I had just moved to Fareham from London to be with my boyfriend (now husband).

I'd grown up going to church, but wouldn't call myself a Christian in the way I acted. I only knew friends from work, so as a New Year's resolution, I thought I'd test-drive some churches to

see what they were like and whether I could make any friends. I started with St

John's and never left! It felt like coming home, because of the combination of friendship and faith. I don't think I realised that I had been looking for faith, but I did realise there was something missing in my life.

In my second week there, I met a young couple Amy and Mark who were starting a house group. We met every week and grew in faith together. Amy is now ordained and remains a good friend. I still go to the same house group and it's really important to me.

My husband Tom doesn't come to church with me, but he knows church has been incredible for us. When I became pregnant with our first child, the company Tom worked for went bust. However our church friends were there to provide everything for us, and it really felt as though God was saying "Everything will be OK."

We also had a tricky situation last January. Tom was training to become a teacher and things were getting on top of him. Some of our church friends came round and took our children, Joy and Teddy, to the beach, so Tom and I could have some quality time together. They supported the family with love, prayer and food!

**What do you love about your church?**

The people there are such a great community. From the moment I walked through the door, people cared for us. If I take friends or strangers, I have no doubt they'll be welcomed in the same way.

Something that's really important to me is knowing that God accepts people of all orientations, backgrounds and genders. I hadn't acted in a very 'Christian' way towards myself and others, yet St John's accepted me, even though I was 'living in sin' and had some challenges in the past.

I'm very keen on being part of Christians in Pride, supporting those from LGBT backgrounds. At St John's there are different views on sexual ethics. For example, my vicar believes strongly that we should love and respect all people, but the correct context for sex is within a marriage between a man and a woman. I don't agree with him. But it's like being part of a family. We may disagree about stuff but we still love each other - that's amazing!

