

CARING:
Helen George
as Trixie and,
far right,
with other
cast in
South
Africa

Midwife Helen answers the call...of African village desperate for new childbirth clinic

By Sharon Feinstein

ON TV, the fictional midwives of Nonnatus House work tirelessly to aid pregnant women in a desperately poor community.

Now, in a touching case of life imitating art, Call The Midwife star Helen George has vowed to help build a much needed childbirth clinic in an impoverished South African village.

The 31-year-old actress, who plays sassy Trixie Franklin in the hit BBC1 drama, was moved to action after witnessing the primitive conditions in Mamre, 30 miles from Cape Town.

She spent five hours in the village while in South Africa filming the Call The Midwife Christmas special – in which some of the characters travel from London to treat babies suffering from malnourishment, polio and Down's syndrome. An insider described the plot as 'dramatic, heart-rending and tremendously uplifting'.

Ingrid Lestrade, head of the Path Out Of Poverty group spearheading the bid to build the clinic, says the actress's visit made them feel they had been 'touched by an angel'.

'Helen was desperate to help us and has pledged to return with other cast members and build us a midwifery clinic,' she said.

'She is determined to help raise the £36,000 needed to build it. At the moment it's a ten-mile walk to the nearest hospital where women have to pay money they can't afford. We are so isolated that ambulances

take hours to arrive, so we have to find creative ways for the community to help itself.

'Helen asked a lot of questions about the health aspect of our programme. We are trying to reduce the number of babies being born with foetal alcohol syndrome and malnutrition.

'It was incredible that she spent so much time with a tiny project like ours and has committed to returning and devoting her time and energy to us.

'She is just an incredible woman.'



BBC / NEAL STREET PRODUCTIONS

Cof E praises godparents – with 'trendy' Post-it notes

THE Church of England has been accused of 'dumbing down' after drawing up a new service in which worshippers use Post-it notes, clap like football fans and move their fingers like 'twinkling stars'.

The new liturgy will be used in hundreds of churches for the first time today to celebrate the role of godparents. But in an outspoken attack, the former Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, said it reflected the Church's 'now familiar desire for being trendy'.

And he slammed the loss of reverence and the creation of an atmosphere he likened to a game of 'bingo'.

In the suggested liturgy for the Church's first Godparents' Day, which can be used at Holy Communion, worshippers are urged to write their thoughts about godparents on notes to stick on a 'memory wall' and to tie ribbons to a 'prayer tree'.

At the opening of the service, they are told to act like a football crowd and, in response to the call 'God is great!' perform 'a double clap with an arm raise' as they shout out 'Let the people praise you!' The vicar is told to repeat this 'as often as feels right' and then to 'encourage everyone to shout Hallelujah really loudly!'

The congregation is asked to touch their feet and put their hands over

By Jonathan Petre

RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

their ears during prayer asking for God's help 'during life's journey'. They are then invited to draw a heart shape over the front of their bodies, and think of members of the community such as teachers or social workers.

Worshippers should then hold up their hands and move their fingers 'like twinkling stars' to honour people that shine in their lives.

Bishop Nazir-Ali said the new service would not attract lapsed churchgoers because they would expect familiar rituals, 'reverence and awe' rather than 'touchy-feely group dynamics [and] the atmosphere of a class in primary school.' The bishop, who defends traditional values in his new book Faith, Freedom And The Future, said: 'When they come into a church, worshippers should sense the presence of a holy God, not the bonhomie they may experience at bingo.'

But the service was defended by a CofE spokesman, who said it 'acknowledges and supports' the relationship between godparents and godchildren and 'recognises its importance in the lifelong journey of discovering all that faith in Jesus Christ means.'

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