

Chapter Six

Helpful Insights

Holidays and Single Adults

Many single adults face one of the most depressing times of the year during the holiday season beginning with Thanksgiving and ending with New Year's Day. With the emphasis on the family, they are reminded of what is missing or lost.

The single parent facing the holidays wonders how to include the family of the former spouse. How much involvement do they want? The children should not be denied knowing both sets of grandparents. The never-married person may find family gatherings uncomfortable. Cousins, aunts and uncles arrive as couples. They may still face the question, "Aren't you married yet?"

Widows and widowers approach the holidays with apprehension as they contemplate attending work and church festivities without a spouse. Questions such as, "Where will I sit?" "What if the tables have places for couples only, how will my presence affect seating arrangements?" "Should I get a family member or friend to go with me?"

This, along with the additional stress the holidays cause for everyone, almost makes some single adults wish they could jump from October to mid-January. Surely, there is a way to cope with this. Here are some suggestions for coping with the holidays:

Recognize that stressful times are just ahead. Knowing this somehow makes it easier to cope. With the increase in social activities, it is easy to eat too many sweets and lose needed sleep.

Count blessings. It is easy to list the things that are perceived to be lacking. Look instead for reasons to be grateful. One of the best means of overcoming depression is to praise God.

Focus attention on others. Becoming involved in the lives of others diverts self-pity. There are many benefits gained thorough physical activities and socializing during the holidays.

Consider the true meaning of Christmas. Two thousand years ago, humanity received the greatest Christmas gift ever. Following the Wisemen's example, give gifts. Think of ways to give without spending much money.

Become involved in church activities. During the holidays, there is always extra work involved in planning and preparing for church

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events. Volunteer to assist with the children's program, build sets for plays, assist with decorations, or help with the extra cleaning.

Here is a list of suggested activities for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day to help counter some of the difficult times.

- ✓ Encourage church families to invite a single adult to their homes for Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Year's.
 - ✓ Plan an after-Thanksgiving Party on Friday.
 - ✓ Have regular Bible studies on Advent themes.
 - ✓ Encourage single adults to write short devotional thoughts to share with the group or the entire church.
 - ✓ Plan a single adult shopping trip.
 - ✓ Have a tree-trimming party. This might be for the church, someone needing assistance, or your home. Remember to include help with taking down and putting away the decorations after the holidays, too.
 - ✓ Go Christmas caroling with hot chocolate and donuts afterwards. This may be to church families or to nursing homes.
 - ✓ Have a cookie decorating party and make gifts for home bound church members or nursing home residents.
 - ✓ Visit the home bound. Take along cookies, fruit, or small gifts made during the cookie decorating party.
 - ✓ Plan a Christmas party. Invite other single adult groups to join.
 - ✓ Go sledding, skating, or tobogganing together or the winter activity in your area.
 - ✓ Plan a retreat after Christmas and before New Year's. If this time doesn't work, make it part of the plans for the first of the year. It provides something to anticipate.
 - ✓ Attend Christmas Eve or other services geared for the family as a group. Remember Single Adult Ministries may be someone's family.
 - ✓ Plan a New Year's Eve Party ending with breakfast together.
 - ✓ Spend New Year's Day together with each one bringing something for a potluck.
 - ✓ Appoint prayer and care partners for the holidays. Suggest they contact each other at least once a week.
 - ✓ Have a late Christmas Day gathering for those who may spend the day alone.
 - ✓ Look at the Christmas decorations together. This may be a city's special place or a drive through different neighborhoods.
 - ✓ Plan to serve others. Volunteer to help the service organizations that provide meals on Thanksgiving and Christmas.
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- ✓ Attend a special performance of a Christmas celebration together. Plan to eat dinner before the performance or dessert afterwards.

A Historical View of Singleness

The debate on family values, the role of the family, and the effect of family on society is no longer an issue centered in religious institutions. Family has become a favorite issue for political debate and is used to identify various candidates. A look at recent history indicates that many of the issues discussed and held in high esteem are relatively new entries in family traditions.

The phenomenon of single adults began with the baby boomer generation, individuals born between 1946 and 1964, as singleness was increasingly accepted. The following is a brief overview of American society since 1950, identifying changes that affected families, and set the stage for a new phenomenon called single adults.

The expanding post-war economy of the 1950s had a great effect on people's lives. Men returning from war needed to regain their positions in the workplace. Their return resulted in newsreels and movies depicting women back in the home and doing their patriotic duty of rearing children and baking apple pies. The expanding economy created a workplace ripe for advancement and stability. The social structure of men working and women tending the family almost became a universal ideal. This structure placed the financial responsibility squarely on the shoulders of men, thus making marriage almost a necessity for women. Men were expected to marry regardless of their fears about accepting financial responsibility. By 1957, 96 percent of Americans of marriageable age were married.¹

The 1950s emphasis on marriage was a new phenomenon. Television, another new entry, supported and promoted family values through shows such as *Leave It to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Father Knows Best*. Other programs such as *I Love Lucy*, *The Honeymooners*, and *The Life of Riley*, depicted the upward mobility or the desires to raise the characters' social class.

Societal emphasis on marriage and family caused single adults to feel ostracized from mainstream society. These feelings were reinforced by pop psychology that described single women as "biological inferiors and discards who do not offer good matrimonial prospects."²

Descriptors for men were equally uncomplimentary. "Emotional immaturity and infantile fixations" were seen as the root causes of bachelorhood.³

The 1960s decade was affected by volatile issues. The United

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States grieved the assassination of a young president. The build-up of armed forces in Vietnam led to a war where the issues were confused and unclear. Protests became a common occurrence during the later part of this decade. Scenes of the killings at Kent State are engraved on many minds. The racial inequalities of the 1950s demanded attention. The women's movement came to the front with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*. Women entered the workforce as financial restraints demanded more money or a revised lifestyle.

Individuals started spending significant portions of time away from families. A sizeable single adult population developed. With few role models, this population segment developed its own value structure and set of mores. Although somewhat liberated from the 1950s counterpart, single adults continued to feel alienation from mainstream society.

The shift away from family and the increasing single adult population started in the 60s and continued through the 70s. The single adult population increased, due in part to the increasing divorce rate. The increasing number of divorces added another dimension, single parents. The need to minister to individuals whose lives were affected by divorce caused churches to begin Divorce Recovery Programs, the beginning of Single Adult Ministries.

The values and mores of society experienced little improvement during the 1980s. Although the economy in the United States began to recover, it did not raise the living standards for everyone. There was a widening gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots.'

With the increasing single adult population and rising divorce rate, single adults continued to feel alienation from the larger society. Role models were still lacking. Baby-boomer single adults, especially never-married adults, continued to blaze new trails as they entered middle age and gave serious thought to retirement years.

Employment opportunities provided challenges. The lower salaries received by single women placed many of them in the uncomfortable position of being unable to fully support themselves. Because there were no traditional family ties to consider, employers began to view single adults as more likely candidates for job transfers. This viewpoint downplayed the significance of the social network of single adults and the role of friends in their lives. The friendship network of single adults is as important, if not more, as family ties. Work, church, and family, however, frequently failed to treat these networks as important or valuable.

The lack of sensitivity to the needs of single people can also be seen in church communities. Although more and more religious institutions, particularly in urban areas, are becoming aware of their single

members, few are aware of what single people require to feel included. When the rhythm of formal religious life is centered on marriage and birth, single people experience themselves on the outside of life's important events. The more single people feel that their needs are not reflected by the institutions in which they participate, the more they feel peripheral to society. People may not be immediately aware of how much this sense of marginality affects their well-being.⁴

Singleness has become a part of the culture. Books, television programs, and packaged food cater to the needs of single adults. The need for validation as “complete people and to participate fully in the institutions of society” remains unmet.⁵ Until singleness is viewed as an equally viable lifestyle as marriage, many single adults will continue to feel like marginalized members of society.

Image, Image, Image

In preparation for a workshop entitled “Great Things about Being Single,” input was gathered from a cross-section of single adults and ministry leaders. Most responses provided additional insights. Feelings about singleness vary from person to person and depend greatly on one's mind set. There are days when many emphatically say singleness is “great.” Another day may find them saying, “It stinks and makes a drive past the landfill smell like ‘White Shoulders’ (or your favorite perfume or after-shave).”

It was easy to quickly conclude that today's emphasis on the family often served to reinforce negative feelings. The word “family” in church names often was interpreted as loudly proclaiming “single adults aren't welcomed here.” While the intent may be defined as the community within the church, persons without families often felt out-of-sync.

What was the role of Single Adult Ministries? What image did the ministry project? For those on the outside looking in, did the ministry project an image of demanding persons wanting things done for them? Was it viewed as exclusive and its participants unwilling to mingle with the entire church community? Perhaps one of the great challenges of Single Adult Ministries is maintaining a positive image with single adults.

Some view Single Adult Ministries as a complainers' convention. But then, who better understands the trauma of divorce, death, or single-parenting than someone who has walked the path? The challenge is to provide encouragement and support and to enable individuals to begin forming new hopes and dreams. Others may perceive Single Adult Ministries as something for younger single adults. For some with long-term and strong ties to a church, their need for fellowship has been met through a

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variety of networks. With the transience of today's society, the need to form friendships with single adults will always be present. For new persons, Single Adult Ministries may be the entry point into the entire community of believers.

Single Adult Ministries in today's church is responsible to manifest the premise that singleness is an acceptable, legitimate lifestyle, and to welcome, affirm, and support single persons in life's challenges. The image of Single Adult Ministries is one of the most important factors to consider as the ministry is forged. If we are to attract sharp, growing single adults to our ministry and church, then Single Adult Ministries should be viewed as a place led by and filled with bright, capable, creative adults who are living life to its fullest. The activities planned for Single Adult Ministries should enhance this positive, healthy image, rather than reinforcing the old myths and stereotypes about the single adult lifestyle.

Here are seven ways to change the church's attitude toward and improve its image of single adults.

1. Provide Single Adult Ministries information and positive support from the pulpit by the pastor, staff members, and church leaders.
 2. Encourage the placement of single adults in leadership positions throughout the congregation.
 3. Encourage single adults to give testimonies in the worship services or at church meetings, explaining how God has ministered to them through the church.
 4. Include articles in the church newsletter and Sunday bulletin with demographic information about the community's single adults, profile of the single adults attending your church, and articles featuring single adults who have made a difference in the church and community.
 5. Initiate programs or conversation with all church boards and committees, providing information about the unique ministry opportunity single adults offer.
 6. Help single adults focus on becoming part of the church's agenda and vision.
 7. Be patient and prayerful. Attitudes don't change overnight. Focus on being consistent with re-educating the congregation. Along with the single adults in the congregation, set the best example you can for faithful church service.
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Keys to an Effective Single Adult Ministry

Once a need is identified, people want a prompt resolution or means of meeting that need. It is difficult to invest time in long-range planning. The need becomes the focus rather than planning. Time devoted to planning produces few immediate results. However, to attempt to address a need without an effective plan causes the ministry or program to resolve few, if any, needs.

The first step in developing an effective Single Adult Ministry is to accept the reality of investing large amounts of time, energy, and resources into planning. Effective long-range planning helps a ministry or program to achieve its mission and to be viewed by others as successful.

Dr. Kennon L. Callahan in *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* writes that long-range planning is diagnostic in its focus, strategic in its decisions, and responsibly and courageously hopeful. It is diagnostic as a congregation concentrates on characteristics in the local church and community that are critical in developing substantial, solid ministry plans. In other words, a church knows its strengths and the needs of the community well enough to focus on the greater needs. Discussion and study are vital prerequisites for long-range planning. The planning process produces measurable goals and objectives and provides motivation as the ministry or program develops.

Callahan identifies two types of keys: relational and functional. Functional keys are more visible and, therefore, easier to label. Relational keys focus on the bonds that form between individuals involved in the ministry or program.

The first relational key is for a program or ministry to have **specific, concrete mission objectives**. This requires the ministry to identify the group or groups in which to invest its financial and leadership resources. A new Single Adult Ministry is well advised to start slow by beginning with one ministry. Other ministries and programs are identified for future implementation.

Concrete refers to the ministry delivering effective help, hope, and new life in a skillful, compassionate, and courageous manner. The objectives need to be measurable. An objective to help individuals grow spiritually is difficult to measure. An objective to see individuals involved in the diverse aspects of the church is measurable. For example, it is easy to determine that three persons introduced to the church through SAM are now involved in the church as they serve as nursery workers, ushers, and choir members.

Visitation is as important to a program or ministry as it is to the total church program. More and more individuals find their way into the

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church as a result of their involvement in a ministry or program. This often occurs as friendships are formed, pressing needs are met, and awareness of spiritual needs increase.

It is important to maintain a balance with visitation. One woman said she received coupons for a free meal from one church, cookies from another, and a pie from a third church. She felt as if the churches were trying to “buy” her attendance and participation. She continued her search for a church. Many experts recommend a short phone call or note from the church acknowledging the visitor. This avoids situations of unwelcome visitors or scheduling a convenient time for a home visit.

The importance of friendly greeters cannot be overstressed. These individuals must be comfortable in talking with visitors and skilled in creating a comfortable atmosphere. It is a strong asset if they easily remember names and faces. People feel welcomed and accepted when called by their names on the second and third visits.

A vital component for the development of a successful program or ministry is long-range plans to establish significant relational groups. Most individuals have four life searches: for individuality, community, meaning, and hope. For new ministry and programs, this is more easily achieved. It is easier to form new relationships while the program is also new, flexible, and in developmental stages.

Leadership with a vision for the ministry is necessary. A ministry reflects the excitement, compassion, and commitment of its leaders. Leadership also must have the responsibility for and authority to direct the ministry. Leadership training needs to be high on the financial priority list. Without effective leadership, the success of the ministry is jeopardized.

The decision-making needs to be participatory. That is, those involved in the program need to feel their opinions are valued. While everyone does not have voting rights, they need the opportunity to voice their concerns. Many good ideas and plans are sabotaged because the individuals affected by the changes did not have adequate time to process them. Changes create anxiety; giving people time to consider the changes allows them time to lower their anxiety levels.

The functional characteristics of an effective ministry refer to the physical features of the facilities. Effective and successful churches have at least one competent program that is respected by the community. This program might be divorce recovery, ministry to single-parent families, or Bible study. With this program in place, the other programs and ministries tend to rise to its level of competence. Members of the community assume that all programs offered possess the same level of excellence.

An effective ministry strives for easy accessibility to the meeting room. Since this characteristic is not one that a ministry easily controls, there are ways to compensate for this weakness. For example, a meeting room that is not close to the main entrance can be made more accessible by directional signs. A better solution is to station greeters along the route to the room. A warm welcome from these individuals help visitors feel safe in the new environment.

Good publicity and high visibility in church newsletters and bulletins and newspapers serve to enhance the community's impression of the ministry. Remember a ministry or program never receives another opportunity to make a first impression.

Many ministries and programs have members with computer skills that make the task of good publicity much easier. Using these members' skills benefits the ministries and provides these individuals with opportunities for ministry.

Adequate meeting space needs to be considered as rooms are selected. A room can be uncomfortably crowded or uncomfortably empty. The meeting room should allow room for growth without feeling too crowded. Empty chairs easily accessible without climbing over people are important for those arriving late.

While one goal of most ministries is to become self-supporting, new ministries and programs need financial support. In addition to providing the necessary funds, financial investment from the congregation often means interest and support as they watch for investment returns.

A new ministry needs finances during the planning stages. Training is part of the planning process and training requires financial investments. New resources and materials are needed as beginning ministries develop their strategies. Publicity and promotional materials are essential to new programs. Many ministries and programs become self-supporting and begin to generate additional funds within three to five years.

Meeting the relational characteristics leads to feelings of satisfaction among attendees. If the functional characteristics are not met, feelings of dissatisfaction rise. Many leaders are more attuned to dissatisfaction than satisfaction levels. People are more vocal regarding those happenings that cause dissatisfaction than expressing appreciation for the events that leave them feeling satisfied.

It is easier to react to and perhaps solve the problems that create dissatisfaction. Raising levels of satisfaction require long-range planning. Ministries need to identify their strengths. Power for the future comes from strengths. Developing and expanding strengths are fundamental to growth. Concentrating on weaknesses leads to deterioration of strengths.

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Four steps are important for effective and successful ministry.

1. Develop a realistic assessment of where the ministry is. What are the current goals and objectives? Are they being achieved?
2. Make fundamental decisions for its future direction. What are the dreams and visions of the ministry? What tools are needed to make them reality?
3. Study its strengths. What are the ministry's strengths? How can these strengths be expanded?
4. Decide the strategic objectives that will advance long-range effectiveness in ministry. Are the current objectives realistic and measurable? Do the objectives reflect the needs of the community today?

Developing an effective ministry or program requires an investment of time, energy, and finances. Planning is difficult and results may not be visible for months. Yet an effective ministry will not happen without adequate planning.

Single Parents—A Vital Part of the Church

With the increase in single-parent families, the Church must prepare to minister better to them. This includes the children as well as the parents. Not all single-parent homes result from death or divorce. An increasing number of women are choosing medical technology to have a child before marriage. Other single-parent families result from adoption and births out of wedlock.

Many professionals see the grief process for the divorced or widowed single parent as similar. While these similarities exist, the relationships are quite different. Those single-again as a result of death experience finality to the relationship that divorced people do not. Due to the children, divorced couples maintain contact as their parenting roles continue. An effective ministry recognizes and addresses the uniqueness of each situation.

According to Mervin E. Thompson in *Starting Over Single*, the first stage is shock. It is almost impossible to feel or decide anything. Individuals are numb all over. Shock is a state of disbelief, an inability to accept what has happened to us.

Second is denial. This occurs when a dinner place is still set for the absent spouse, clothes remain in the closet, not accepting the reality of death, or signing cards using both names. Denial is living a lie. Third is emotional overload. Holding feelings inside causes this. Verbalizing feelings help to put them in proper perspective.

Disappointment and failure are the fourth stage. While most com-

mon as a result of divorce, the widow/er may share these feelings. Persons deal with their failure as well as those feelings coming from family members and friends. They must cope with perceptions of disgrace, disappointment, and shame. They grieve over time poorly spent and the rough edges of the relationship. The widow/er faces questions of “Could I have prevented my spouse’s death?”

Fifth is fear. It includes fear of the future, losing control, coping with all the changes, and managing life to name a few. Times of anger and crying come when least expected or appreciated.

Anger is the sixth stage. Feelings of abandonment, rejection or perceived rejection, and bad memories cause anger. There may be anger at the ex-spouse, someone else, or even God that such a thing could happen. Feelings of anger are normal and natural, although there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing them. Not expressing anger leads to depression. Depression is the most dangerous dynamic of the grief process. It lowers resistance to physical illness. It may be an attempt to escape reality.

The eighth stage is dependency. While grieving, it is easy to become overly dependent on another. A person may give the decision-making authority to someone else. This should not lead to a new relationship before finding a spirit of independence.

For the person experiencing divorce, there is often a surprising sense of sadness. This sadness results from the loss of friends, family history, and good memories. It is normal for these feelings to come and go during the divorce proceedings.

The children of single-parent homes face many adjustments and questions. Children of divorce often blame themselves saying, “If I’d behaved better or if I hadn’t gotten so angry, then Mom and Dad would still be married.” After losing a parent due to death, children may blame themselves for the illness or accident causing the death. While ministering to the parents, recognize the pain and questions of the children.

Workers in the children’s department have an important role in the children’s lives. These teachers must be aware of the questions children will ask and how to answer them. The questions may center on why, love, and self-worth. Answer the questions honestly, giving encouragement and building self-esteem.

A child may say, “Mommy says Daddy doesn’t love us/me anymore.” In response, affirm the child by saying, “You’re such a neat person your daddy loves you. Sometimes daddies and mommies say things they don’t mean because they have hurt feelings.”

Or “Is my mommy or daddy bad?” “Everyone makes mistakes.”

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Sometimes mommy or daddy need time to think—to figure out what is the right thing. They sometimes forget to tell or show how much they love you.”

It may be necessary to consult with the parent, making sure you don't contradict what's said at home. Make it clear you don't want to confuse the child or contradict the parent. Most parents understand and appreciate the concern. This also allows others to befriend and encourage the parent.

The increase of single-parent homes provides the rationale for evaluating the criterion of contests and participation in activities. Can a child be denied winning a contest or participating in a musical or play because of absences caused by court-ordered visitations? The child isn't responsible for the decisions. The distance between homes may prevent attending practices. In a small church, both parents may be uncomfortable about being present for the same services.

Sunday School teachers need to remember birthdays and other special occasions. Spending time with single-parent children gives them a sense of importance. Teachers often fill a needed role. This includes attending sports, school, and other activities as often as possible.

Be aware of the children of single-parent homes as trips, parties, retreats, and other activities requiring money are planned. The single parent, especially the single mother, may be living on a limited budget. Some of the extras taken for granted by others often become luxuries for them.

As a result of court-ordered visitations, some children will attend your Sunday School on an *irregular-regular* basis. The attendance may be every other week or just once a month. Recognize these patterns and work to make the child feel part of the class.

Some churches may address single-parent needs during Sunday School. There are three basic philosophies:

1. Keep them in classes with all other adults regardless of marital status.
2. Put them in the single adult class or start a single adult class.
3. Begin a class designed for single parents.

Many churches face difficulties resulting from building limitations and size of the congregation. Consideration of adult needs is often a low priority when facing space limitations. If space prohibits forming a new class, there are other ways to meet their needs. If the adult class is aware of single parents and their needs, compassion, understanding, and support often come naturally. Other classes may require education before much integration occurs. Some single parents feel part of a class

and continue to attend following divorce or death. If this happens, the teacher must be aware of these individuals and circumstances during class discussions.

The second philosophy states single parents are part of the Single Adult Ministries. While they are single adults, children can cause conflict. Those without children may have difficulty understanding the experiences of single parents or have difficulty comprehending the restrictions children place on parents. While it is possible for the two groups to mesh, some education needs to occur. This provides single adults without children the opportunity to support single parents. This creates a give-and-take situation. Giving love, encouragement, emotional and financial support fills the free time and conquers some of the loneliness single adults without children may experience. Investing in the lives of others gives a sense of fulfillment and usefulness.

The third position is to begin a single-parent ministry. While this is ideal, it will not be immediately possible for all churches. Since this does not relieve the church of its responsibility to single parents and their children, design a single-parent ministry to meet the needs of the parents and children at the same time. While attending support and recovery groups for the parents, the children participate in programs dealing with childhood stresses and pressures. If the programs run simultaneously, babysitting is only necessary for pre-schoolers. Sharing feelings and concerns allows children to realize many of their feelings are normal and acceptable. They often share anger and other emotions with peers they might not readily share otherwise.

Before these sessions end, bring the parent and children together. Help them to see themselves as a family. They need to realize they are OK just the way they are. Develop some family pride and provide time to practice in a controlled environment the skills learned during the previous meetings.

Whichever philosophy the church decides to take, the goal is ministry to single parents. One of their basic needs is for friends who listen. The single parent doesn't need platitudes or judgmental remarks. Their need is for a friend to listen while expressing emotions. They need someone to hold them accountable for attitudes and signs of self-pity. They need someone to pray for them and walk beside them during this dark time. They need hugs, pats on the shoulder, and words of encouragement; someone to tell them they have value and worth.

Another need is for assistance. Many single mothers face a dramatic change in lifestyle following death or divorce. Many live at the poverty level. They need scholarships for the children and themselves to attend

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camps, retreats, and other activities. This also includes many social activities whether as a class or as a part of a group. Many will need assistance when faced with house and car maintenance. They often need food and clothing. The holidays are difficult as they accept the difference between what was and what now is. While it may be court-ordered, many receive only partial child support payments. There is a large number that never receive any support payments. The never-married mother rarely receives any child support.

Parenting should be a team effort. The single parent faces responsibility for the household as well as the pressure from work. *Here are some ways members of the congregation can minister to the single parent:*

1. Volunteer baby-sitters to allow the single parent time alone.
2. Provide casseroles or surprise meals that free the parent of one responsibility.
3. Assistance with house and car repairs and maintenance.
4. Make offers for help specific, including date and time.

10 Things Any Church Can Do to Become Single Adult Friendly

1. Identify the single adults in your congregation and on your responsibility list. Remember that single adults includes those who have never-married, divorced, and widowed. In other words, any person without a spouse is a single adult.
 2. Become single adult sensitive. Attempt to listen to announcements, lessons, sermons, etc. as a single adult. Does “man” equate “husband”? Does “woman” mean “wife”? Would single adults feel comfortable? Would they feel out-of-sync since “family” appears to be the norm? Does “family” mean husband, wife, two kids, two pets, two cars?
 3. Recognize singleness as a viable lifestyle. It is possible to read some of Paul’s writings in his New Testament letters and build a strong case for singleness. Admittedly, that probably was not his intent. It is possible to affirm single adults and their singleness without undermining any family ministries. Some single adults are unmarried due to their dating standards as Christians. Others have experienced the death of a spouse. Some are single as the result of the decisions of others to leave their family responsibilities or continue abuse behaviors directed toward themselves and others. Remember, it is statistically impossible for every
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- person to be married, even eliminating age and race barriers.
4. Realize single adults will be a permanent part of the population. As baby-boomers continue to mature, there will be an increasing number of single senior adults. Consider the following statistics: Single adults represent more than 40 percent of the population of those over 18 years of age in the United States.
 5. Build a relationship with a single adult. While you may know a person who is a single adult, do you know how that person thinks? What feelings does he or she experience during and as a result of a church service? Do you know what his or her goals, hopes, and dreams are? If not, take time to develop a relationship. Walking beside an individual provides valuable insights into the issues and challenges he or she faces.
 6. Recognize the adulthood of single adults. Much of North American society recognizes marriage as the rite of passage into adulthood. When individuals do not observe this rite, they tend to feel out-of-balance. Single adults hold responsible positions in the corporate world. Some own and operate their own businesses. Yet when they attend church, they frequently find themselves being viewed as less than mature.
 7. Encourage involvement in Single Adult Ministries' events. This may be in your church or it may mean participating in events offered by other churches. It is not necessary to fear that single adults will begin to attend other churches. Experience shows that single adults whose spiritual needs are being met in a congregation seldom begin to attend the 'other church' on a regular basis. They have established an identity with the local church, while the 'other church' provides the opportunity to network with other single adults.
 8. Realize that some single adults have reached a place of contentment with their singleness. Accept this contentment. This does not mean they have closed the doors to future relationships. Rather, it means they have learned to be content at this stage of life.
 9. Be aware of events that create stress for single adults. These events will vary with each single adult. However, here are some trigger-events:
 - ✓ loss or threatened loss of employment.
 - ✓ financial difficulties. Remember there is only one person to provide an income.
 - ✓ parenting challenges. Parenting was designed as a two-person
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responsibility. Single parents may need assistance in providing role models and mentors for their children.

- ✓ death of a parent. This is especially difficult for never-married adults. These individuals have lost a major identity. Some report feeling like an orphan.
- ✓ death of a friend. Friends for many single adults become like family. Therefore, the death of a friend is traumatic.

10. Remember we are all part of the Body of Christ. Our identity in Christ is based on a personal relationship, regardless of marital status. When the Body of Christ functions at its best, there is a role for each person.

Necessary Elements of Single Adult Ministries

During a gathering of Single Adult Ministries leaders, we discussed the question, “Where does SAM need to be in five years?” As the group distilled several key elements, I considered the question for SAM in the Church of the Nazarene.

The term, single adult as used here refers to people who are divorced, never-married, or widowed and over the age of 35. As SAM prepares for the future, it needs to recognize the difference among the various life stages. Those less than 35 years of age typically have a different perspective. Life experiences, such as divorce and death, lead to a different perspective. Never-married people see life through other lens.

This means that we need to be sure all perspectives are covered, even if that means preparing and presenting different information to different life stage groups. If you’re in a small ministry, you can accomplish this by presenting the information to the whole group and then dividing into life stages and age groups. What affects a person at 35 years of age is different from that of a 55-year-old person. The principles may be the same, but life applications are different.

First, there needs to be a strong emphasis on developing healthy relationships. This includes same gender and cross gender relationships, including friendships and dating relationships. Relationships are a huge topic that often requires several presentations. Since most single adults want to be married at some point, teaching and discussing these topics need to include everyone.

Single adults want, and maintain, good cross gender friendships that provide another perspective and affirm their personhood. Since

many single adults live alone, friendships become an essential part of personality development. Interactions with others provide and require personality adjustments during the give-and-take of life.

Understanding personality types is one means of developing healthy relationships. As we understand the various personality types, people understand themselves better and gain insights into their relationships with others. A web search identifies many sites that provide information on this topic. There are also many books that address personality types:

The Five Love Languages for Singles, by Gary Chapman

The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are by Kevin Leman

Personality Plus: How to Understand Others by Understanding Yourself by Florence Littauer.

Dating is a topic that creates challenges for SAM. If there is a series on dating, people may wonder if the goal is to “get everyone married.” Then if people meet a future spouse in SAM, what does that say about those who don’t get married? For these reasons, SAM has often ignored the topic rather than dealing with difficult issues.

However, the questions remains, “Is there a better place that SAM to meet healthy, Christian people?” The answer should be “No.” While some come into SAM in need of healing, there should also be people who are healthy and ready for marriage. Once again, it’s time to face and address a difficult topic—the “both/and” aspects of SAM. Some will get married and some won’t. It’s reality.

This means we need to help people develop and maintain healthy boundaries while dating. This is especially true with the number of people using online dating services wisely, how to safely meet face-to-face people, what’s appropriate information to give, and how to verify the information people give.

An internet search located this website, <http://www.dangersofinternetdating.com/>. There is good information posted, including stories from individuals about their internet dating experiences. There were also great tips for building relationships as well as identifying red flags.

One of the first rules of internet dating is to be careful in disclosing personal information such as home phone number and address. This is great advice to follow whenever and wherever meeting new people—even at church and church sponsored events.

Suggestions on internet dating recommend meeting in a public place. Here’s another suggestion—have the person attend a service or church event. This creates a safe environment, provides opportunity to observe behaviors and interactions with others, and allows others to give their

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insights and observations. Remember, even as adults, it's easy to see only what we want to see. Others, therefore, have a more objective point of view.

Second, there needs to be an emphasis on **preparation for life's transitions**. As single adults, many transition from one stage to another with little input from others. This sense of independence can become a weakness, if we fail to make preparations for the future.

Since single adults live on one income, saving for retirement can be a struggle, or one of the last items to include in a budget. yet, many financial counselors give staggering figures of how small amount of money invested or saved regularly grow into significant amounts.

Job transition is another area of concern. With companies downsizing and out-sourcing, many people face this challenge. This gives SAM an opportunity to network with other ministries in the local church to encourage and support individuals as they transition from one job to another.

Caring for elderly parents and other relatives is another issue many people face. Learning to balance the demands of work and elder-care creates many challenges. This is often complicated by distance. How do they live in ne state or town and care for people in another? Making decisions regarding the types of care and considering all the options is often overwhelming.

Fortunately, there are books that help when facing these circumstances. While not all written from a Christian perspective, the following books may be helpful when facing this transition:

Taking Care of Parents Who Didn't Take Care of You
by Eleanor Cade

Coping with Your Difficult Older Parent by Grace Lebow,
etc. all.

The Hard Questions for Adult Children and their Aging Parents
by Susan Piver

Doing the Right Thing By Roberta Satow

Third is the need to **celebration**. During another meeting of SAM leaders, one staff member said a single adult in his congregation talked about the lack of celebrations in her life. "The last time I was recognized by the congregation was when I graduated from high school. The next time I'll be recognized may well be when my casket is rolled in." After the initial shock, many affirmed the accuracy of the story.

Build in periodic times to celebrate the milestones in the lives of single adults. These include:

- ✓ New jobs
- ✓ New degrees or training
- ✓ New grandchildren
- ✓ New daughters-in-law or sons-in-law
- ✓ New nieces and nephews
- ✓ New great-nieces and nephews
- ✓ New homes or apartments
- ✓ New cars or other significant purchases
- ✓ Vacation plans
- ✓ Life-changing decisions such as job changes to care for others
- ✓ Community involvement
- ✓ Service to the local church
- ✓ Job milestones--years of service, promotions, or other accomplishments
- ✓ Retirement

Fourth **build bridges** to young adults and new single adults within the congregation. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of SAM is the potential for people to form cliques. While understanding the importance of relationships, these relationships need to have elasticity so others can become part of the group, feeling loved and accepted.

Consider a step-family and how easy it is to exclude some by reminiscing about past events. These conversations typically eliminate some of the family members from the conversation because they don't have the same history. If this happens often enough, some family members may give up trying to find common ground.

SAM must continually monitor and adjust ministry strategies to meet the needs of people as they realize singleness may be a longer term lifestyle than they anticipated. What works for today's ministry, probably won't work tomorrow. Effective leaders are listening to young adults to determine their needs and interest.

It may be necessary to form a new group under the SAM umbrella. Just as many adults don't want to be "promoted" to another class, younger single adults may not wish to join a group they perceive to be for older people.

Building on Sunday School class models and create new ministry groups.

Single Adult Ministries is in a transitional phase. Leadership irresponsible for identifying the various age groups, training leadership, and providing resources. This is an indication of healthy and growing SAM.

¹ Natalie Schwartzberg, et. al. *Single in a Married World*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 14.

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- 2 Ibid., 16.
 - 3 Ibid., 15.
 - 4 Ibid., 28.
 - 5 Ibid., 29.
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