

Starting From Scratch and Itching to Quit: The Basics of Starting a Single Adult Ministry

**BASICS: STATS**

What do we know about singles in our country? About 48%-52% of the population is single (this includes anyone 18 years or older, divorced or widowed).

Currently, over 82 million unmarried adults live in the United States, constituting the highest percentage of single adults at any time in history.\*

What else do we know about singles in relation to the church?

1. Single, never-married are the largest group. They have the most flexible use of their time and money and are the least used and reached in the church.

2. Single-parent families have the least flexible use of their time and money and have the most needs in the church.

Q: So if the number of singles in our country is so high, then why isn’t the church reaching out to them?

A: Singles ministry is difficult. Because singles come in such a wide age range with huge differences in life stages, needs, goals, etc., it’s hard to simply come up with one plan that fits all. Remember, even though the congregation has changed, most churches are still led by married men who have not been single in a long time.  So, not only is singles ministry a challenge for churches but any ministry where the pastors have no experience leading singles.

\*Be sure to download the free stats of singles in the US based on the latest census from www.TheSinglesNetwork.org ;then, click on “tools” and then “basics.”

**Reasons why singles ministries fail:**

1. Some churches are not called to have singles ministries but every church is called to minister to singles. Some churches are called to have something smaller such as a Bible study, book club, or divorce recovery ministry, etc.

2. They imitate other church programs that are not necessarily workable at their church. If a church close by has a great single parent ministry or young adult ministry, etc. instead of reinventing the wheel, partner with them.  God may be calling your church to develop a 30-something ministry or senior singles.

3. Leaders get overworked and over-committed, trying to do it all in 6 months. First, they don’t even know who the leaders are for their ministry. They don’t develop a leadership structure or outline the goals of the ministry. The same one or two people try to do it all.

It’s important in all singles ministries to not only have a team of leaders but also co-leaders. Your leadership should reflect who your audience focus should be. Don’t try and reach 30-something’s if your team is made up of 50-something’s.

Note: If you are a pastor, be sure to find others in the various age groups to lead the ministry.

CAUTION…IF YOU ARE A WOMEN LEADING:

The majority of all singles ministries are started by women. The only problem is over time, women statistically only draw other women UNLESS you have a co-leadership of a strong male. Men that are healthy look for other men in leadership…for mentoring. If they walk into a Sunday school classroom or gathering and see only women running the show, they will not come back. Now I know this is the million dollar questions everywhere. Where are all the men? I have addressed this topic on my website in detail. But for a quick answer... If you pray and start with men, you will get men. If you only start with women, you get women. This means, until God has brought a man or two to help lead, you either become satisfied that you are a single women’s ministry or wait on God.  I have at times recruited a married couple to help start ministry when I couldn’t find a man. I love couples that have been single before, who understand what most of us are going through.

4. Leaders forget to delegate and wait on God, and as a result, they get burned out. Remember, this is a ministry to reach and grow single adults. It’s important that you build your team to help you with this task. It’s important to delegate work out so that the ministry is not just about your ideas but others.

Note: Single adult ministries have to continually be poured into as they change. Discipleship is critical. It’s better to pour yourself into a few people who will duplicate themselves rather than trying to do it yourself. So what if all the ideas and plans you have created don’t get done? Whose ministry is this anyway? Don’t allow the enemy to push you too fast. Take the time to develop others.

**Reasons you SHOULD’NT start a single adult ministry in your church/community:**

1.To give singles a social club. If I have seen and heard this once, I have seen and heard it a 100 times. If you build your ministry only for the purpose of fun things to do on the weekends, then you are building it on a weak foundation that eventually will die. These types of ministries are usually led by 2 women with a few helpers. Over time, the women get burned out and don't want to host anymore events. Once this happens, the ministry goes away.

IF, IF, IF you build the right foundation of the word of God first, if you start with a Bible study, book group, prayer group, divorce recovery, Sunday school class, etc., then you have the right foundation. From that group, I promise you that people will ask each other what they are doing for the weekend. I promise you, the social side will come as a result of the right foundation. Then, when you do have a social, it becomes a strategic fellowship. I also have articles on the website explaining this on the website.

2. Because other churches have one. You have to pray and make sure it’s what God is calling your church to do. You can always attend your church while attending a singles ministry at another church. Then, eventually start something back at your church as you have the support in place.

3. Because of the need or want to help singles get married. Although, heaven forbid, singles meet someone in church! We do want our singles to find the one in church but we first want them to know Christ. We want them as healthy as possible. If getting them married is our only goal, we are in trouble. But the other side, if we don’t acknowledge that 99% of all singles do want to get married, then we are not planning for the type of ministry to help educate and nurture them in that direction.

4. Because singles have demanded that the leadership in the church have one. I have never seen any ministry grow from manipulation or aggressive behavior.  While all pastors don't always get it, even after you have done all your preparation to help them get it, it still has to be a God-thing -- God-inspired and God-led.

**Reasons you SHOULD start a singles’ ministry in your church/community:**

1. To develop an effective outreach to the growing number of single adults in your church and community.

2. To enhance church growth.

3. To help fulfill the Great Commission

4. To help renew the vision and purpose of your congregation.

5. To meet the needs of single adults who want spiritual growth, healing opportunities, and social fellowship.

**BASICS: BEFORE you start a single adult ministry, you must have three things in place.**

1) Prayer

This should be ongoing: daily, weekly, and with others. As you pray, God will bring the right people to help lead this ministry. It’s important to start establishing goals and your mission (this will change as your ministry changes and grows). Praying for each other is also important.

Please note, if you aren’t get together to pray as a team (even if it’s you and your pastor only), your ministry will die. Prayer is the starting place for everything. Prayer will help you decide the direction of your ministry, team membership, goals and problems, among others.. Also, letting the prayer team of your church know what you are doing and your prayer needs will help in the communication of your ministry to the whole church body.

2) Support of staff/leaders

You will need the support of your pastor/church/staff and other singles for this ministry to work. Supporters must understand your passion/vision for this ministry. Please see the article on how to talk to your pastor on my site at www.TheSinglesNetwork.org. Click on “articles” and then “building ministry.”

Research is critical in making your case. For example, getting demographics from your city/town council (of how many single adults live in your area, including widows, single parents, young, old etc.) are valuable in assessing the population group you will be working with as well as getting a printout of all the single adults in your church.

Educating your pastor/staff on the needs of single adults is key if they are going to support you and the vision God has given you. Also take this time to find out what other ministries are in the area. Meet with them to share your ideas and gain support and encouragement. Join forces on retreats, conferences, socials, etc.

Encourage your singles to work with marrieds to educate on both sides. If you are going to get a married deacon to support your ministry, suggest funding, teachers, etc., then you will need to get to know them. Bottom line, singles ministry needs great public relations so that you not only have the provision to start but to also maintain.

3) Opportunity to disciple/develop leadership

A core group of committed individuals (it should cover the demographic of the single adults in your church/community that you are trying to reach) should be developed with an opportunity of continued training.

Single adult ministries are constantly changing (and should to stay fluid) due to marriage, job changes, moving, etc., so it’s important to have the structure available for discipleship and training.

You can purchase a list of editable job descriptions for your ministry at www.TheSinglesNetwork.org and click on the store. If you build a core team of leaders to lead your ministry, but you don’t tell them what you expect from them, train them, come alongside them, and pray with them, etc., then how do you expect them to lead others? You have to lead by example. Also, know that your leaders will change every few months. This is OK and to be expected.

Sometimes the support isn’t there the way you would like. You may have to start the singles ministry first to prove the value of it. This is fine but remember, you should always be working towards getting the support at some point in time. Keeping your pastor/church in the loop is critical.

OK, I know we need to be praying, we need our church to help, and we need to develop a team, but then what?

As you begin with prayer, communication to get the support of your pastor/church, and leadership development, you can also be:

1. Determining scheduling and facility needs.

2. Determining what budget funds are available and needed. (A free handout and mp3 on our site.)

3. Communicating through your church newsletters, bulletins, email, Facebook, Twitter, texting, website, brochure, etc. what you are starting and hoping to achieve. Start a database with the newspaper, radio, and TV contacts. Make sure the church website is up to date (know that 99% of all singles under 55 go there first).

4. Take care of yourself. If you aren’t healthy, then you can’t lead anyone else to be. Be sure to continue to educate yourself not only in the Word but also in information about singles ministry. Develop relationships with other leaders and pastors from other churches. Attend leadership training such the NavigateRetreat.com, or if you are pastor, the MetroConference.net.

5. Patience! Remember that God is in control. We must -- in our enthusiasm -- be sensitive to His timing and His will. In the long run, it is better to take time to develop good relationships and accountability than to rush and have to redevelop or reconcile misunderstandings. Stay open to God's continuing leadership. Your ministry should change as the needs and methods dictate. Enjoy and remember some days will be tough but overall it can be the most rewarding ministry there is. Note: Suggest reading the Book of Nehemiah and follow his model of waiting on God.

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