



How to Begin a Single Adult Ministry



One Sunday you as a church leader may have surveyed your congregation and realized how many of your members were in some way unmarried. Your survey revealed widows and widowers, unmarried divorced persons of both genders, single parents and never married adults. A chill goes up your spine when you realize that your youth group graduates have no place to go for Bible study. You decide you need a SINGLE ADULT ministry, but how? What does it take?

Considering how to reach the unmarried adult for Christ and discipleship can be a daunting task. There are many variables, complications, and issues. This article will introduce you to some first steps to take in reaching the set of unmarried adults that God has given you.

Know “who” your single adults are and “how” they are single.

Recent high school graduates and young career adults ARE NOT single adults. Being in a class or activity with folks their parents’ age (and sometimes their actual parents) just does not cut it. If you do not provide for them, you will lose them. Yes, they are unmarried people but for them the future is open. Marriage and family are still options for the relatively near future. Ministry to them is appropriate under the broadest concept of a single adult ministry, but must always be kept distinct. It is more appropriate to call ministry to this group of 18- about 30 year old unmarried people a Young Adult Ministry, rather than a singles ministry.

A single adult ministry typically reaches over-28 unmarried adults who willingly embrace this label. In some ways their future marital options are not so open. These older career single adults are unmarried for several reasons:

- they have intentionally chosen to be single, for the sake of their career or to be free to engage in ministry;
- circumstances or health have prohibited them from marriage;
- they have had no marriages but many failed relationships, and are gun-shy;
- they have experienced failed marriages and may even be the custodial parent of the children of that relationship;
- they have been widowed.

For the unmarried, adults single adulthood is as much a state of mind as it is a marital condition. Unmarried young adults do not consider themselves to be single adults, and so they are not. Some unmarried median adults may reluctantly embrace the label, while others do so enthusiastically. Many unmarried senior adults would never consider themselves single because they were married for 50+ years, and even though their spouse has passed away, they are, in their own minds, still married.

See what you already have going for you!

Pay attention to your Sunday School organization. If you do not have a **college-career Bible study class**, start one. A large percentage of high school graduates drift away from church. Often it is merely because there is no place for them to go after graduating that is as exciting as the youth group and that speak to the unique needs of young adult transitions. Treat this class as an adult class, not as an extension of the youth group, but do not lump it with single adults or expect it to want to do “single adult things.” College-career (Young

A Basic “How-to” Bibliography for Single Adult Ministry

Any church wishing to start a ministry to the over-25 single adult needs to have and be reading one or more of the following resources:

Walter, Jim. *Understanding Adults 25 and Older*. LifeWay Press, 2001. (Available online at www.lifeway.com. Click on the left column line marked “Ministry Downloads; find the Understanding Series, and click on *Understanding Adults*. This will appear as a PDF file ready to be printed or downloaded.)

Available from LifeWay Christian Resources

Cleary, Tim. *The Single Adult Ministry Solution, Leadership Manual*. Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1996.

Felts, Stephen. *Start a Revolution: Nine World Changing Strategies for Single Adults*. Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1996.

Available From Your Favorite Bookstore

Fagerstrom, Doug, ed. *Singles Ministry Handbook*. Wheaton, Ill: Victor Books, 1989.

Fagerstrom, Doug, ed. *Single Adult Ministry: The Next Step*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1993.

Hershey Terry. *Giving the Ministry Away*. Elgin Ill: David C. Cook, Publishing Company, 1993.

Jones, Jerry. *Growing Your Single Adult Ministry*. Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1993.

Nilson, Sue and Morgan, Andy. *Starting A Single Adult Ministry*, Colorado Springs, CO David C. Cook Publishing Company, 1994.

Reed, Bobbie, ed. *Baker Handbook of Single Parent Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.

A Basic “How-to” Bibliography for Young Adult Ministry

Any church wishing to start a ministry to the under-25 single adult needs one or more of the following resources:

Maynard, Morlee, compiler, *Understanding Young Adults 18-24: Developing Tomorrow’s Leaders Today*. LifeWay Press, 2001.

Adult) classes need to be entities unto themselves, dealing with the unique needs of newly-fledged adults in transition.

Perhaps you have a **same-gender (men or women's) class**. Close examination of the roll might tell you that the majority of the participants, but not necessarily all, are currently unmarried adults. Some of the participants may be married but "unattached" at the moment, or just prefer that kind of class. If this is working don't disturb it. Whether or not you call it a singles class, you already have a viable adult ministry.

If you discover **enough single adults** who are interested, you can create Single Adult Sunday Bible study. You could have age-graded classes, co-ed, or same-gender. A good for grouping folks in Sunday School is "birds of a feather flock together."

If these classes are functioning properly, your job is to help them be the best Sunday School classes possible. Your goal should be to enhance the quality of those classes, and their leadership. Help these classes to organize around the five functions of the church: worship, discipleship, ministry, missions/evangelism, and fellowship. The class, with its teacher (discipleship) as the leader, would elect other leaders who would encourage the class in devotional and personal spiritual growth (worship), in care or shepherding groups and contacts (ministry), in special missions projects or regular outreach to prospects, visitors and new members (missions/evangelism), and in parties and other fun activities throughout the year (fellowship). If your Sunday School classes of unmarried adults were even half-way effective you would have the beginnings of a very good single adult ministry.

A note on what to study: LifeWay Christian Resources provides single-adult specific literature for those who desire it. However, any other age-appropriate LifeWay curricula will work just as well. Single Adult Christians, like other believers, need quality, applicable Bible study that speaks to their needs as adults first, and singles second. There are in fact only a limited number of study topics that are single-adult specific. To study these topics alone would be repetitive and boring. A workable format would be to have on-going systematic Bible study in Sunday School, while addressing the singles-specific topics at conferences or retreats or special studies.

A note on leadership for single adult Sunday School: Bible study teachers for single adult classes need not be single adults themselves. Those teachers must, however, love the Lord and single adults and be willing to partner with single adults in the conduct of ministry of the class.

A single adult ministry that is **based on and springs from the church's Sunday School** ties that ministry back to the church. It places singles at their rightful place in the center of the church life, and does not relegate them to the edges.

So, what if you decide to have a single adult ministry in addition to your Sunday School?

1. You must have consistent, strong leadership. Singles groups last only as long as they have good leaders. Often, when strong leaders leave, the group dissolves, or goes dormant. Many churches realize the need to have a paid, part-or-full time Minister to Single Adults in order to keep up the continuity in the face of fluctuating attendance. Your leadership needs to be educated about the needs, issues and concerns of single adults through reading, and attending various training events.

(Available online at www.lifeway.com. Click on the left column line marked "Ministry Downloads; find the Understanding Series, and click on *Understanding Young Adults*. This will appear as a PDF file ready to be printed or downloaded.)

Robinson, Dale G. *Intersecting Lives: Road Maps to Ministry with Young Adults*. Willow City Press, 1998. Purchase this excellent resource for \$10.00 a copy from Tom Belew, California Southern Baptist Convention, 678 E. Shaw, Fresno, CA 93710.

Baugh, Ken and Hurst, Rich. *Getting Real: An Interactive Guide to Relational Ministry*. Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2000.

Celek, Tim, and Zander, Dieter. *Inside the Soul of a New Generation: Insights and Strategies for Reaching Busters*. Zondervan, 1996.

Ford, Kevin Graham. *Jesus for a New Generation*, InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Rabey, Steve. *In Search of Authentic Faith: How Emerging Generations are Transforming the Church*. WaterBrook Press, 2001.

Wilson, Jim L. *Future Church: Minister in a Post-seeker Age*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004.

Websites of Interest For Single Adult Ministries

<http://singles.ag.org> Quality singles adult resources and information produced by the Assemblies of God Church.

www.nazarene.org/ssm/single Another quality source for ideas and information from the Nazarene Church.

www.gbod.org/ministries/single Resources and ideas produced by the United Methodist Church.

www.nasam.net The website of the National Association of Single Adult Ministers, a fellowship and professional society for church ministers to and with single adults. Lay leaders would benefit from seeing this site also.

www.singlesmall.com A "clearing house" website for all things single adult. Some information is dated.

2. You must involve the single adults themselves in the leading and planning of their own events and activities, drawing on their expertise and skills.
3. You must provide a variety of programming with lots of social activities and food. Programs might include workshops and seminars on topics of interest (finances, interpersonal relationships, divorce recovery, grief recovery, parenting helps), Christian growth studies, outings, sports activities, long and short-distance trips to single adult conferences (e.g. LifeWay's Labor Day Single Adult Conferences at Glorieta Conference Center in New Mexico).
4. You must consistently catch participants' imaginations with outreach and ministry projects.
5. You must help single adults focus on becoming growing disciples of Jesus, and not just seeking new and different relationships. Avoid becoming a "Christian dating service"!
6. You must realize that your single adult group will develop its own personality and reach only a certain segment of your community's single adult population.
7. You must tie your singles' group to the greater goals and purposes of the local church.
8. You must recognize that it may last for a specific period of time, and then die or go dormant, depending on the leaders and participants.

Websites of Interest For Young Adult Ministries

www.rhinocrash.org This is the official website of the young adult ministry of the North Phoenix Baptist Church.

www.youngadults.ag.org This is the website for young adult ministries of the Assemblies of God denomination. It is a very rich site.

www.churchplantingvillage.net This site, sponsored by the North American Mission Board, has a number of good articles on "twenty-somethings" and other topics of interest for young adult ministries.

Acknowledgements:

This article was prepared by Dr. Dale "Geno" Robinson. Geno, until recently, served the California Southern Baptist Convention as Director of Adult Leadership. He served as the Director of Student Ministries for many years and is the author of Intersecting Lives: Road Maps to Ministry with Young Adults. He has led conferences on Single Adult Ministries at the Glorieta West, Equipped for Excellence Sunday School Leadership Events and at various associational training events. He has written adult curriculum and a host of articles for LifeWay Christian Resources.