**Single Parent Families and the Church by James Cruise**

*“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” — James 1:27*

Single-parent families represent nearly 41 percent of all families in the United States. Here in Mississippi, nearly 52 percent of families are single parent led.

Seventy-five percent of all children under age 18 in the U.S. will spend at least some time in a single-parent household.

“She walks in the church and cautiously looks around with her 4-year-old daughter in tow. She hesitantly makes her way to the back of the church and sits quietly, thumbing through her Bible, avoiding eye contact at all costs. She has contemplated this day for months. She wonders if she should be here. Does she really belong? A warm, friendly woman sits beside her and begins to make conversation with the 4-year-old. The young mom is certain that woman notices her empty ring finger and hangs her head in shame.”1

Single-parent-led families are one of the fastest-growing sects of our population, so why have we, the church, ignored them for so long?

With an estimated 17 million single-parent-led families in the United States and numbers increasing daily, it is imperative that the local church understand, embrace and seek to include single-parent families. It is estimated that 95 percent of single parents and their children do not actively attend church. That’s nearly 39 million children unchurched. That represents a mission field as large as the entire population of Central America. Some of them are born-again believers who simply do not feel welcome. As the church — the body of Christ — this should pain us. Many single parents do not feel they belong in the house of God. The fear that they will be judged. They are concerned that others will not understand their journey.

Research indicates that only 5 percent of single-parent families — compared with 35 percent of two-parent families — regularly attend church. What is in the character of the church that discourages single parents from attending?

For far too long, the church has run from the single parents. Of course, we may offer them events several times a year. We may occasionally provide toys at Christmas. But do we stop there? Dare we openly welcome them into our churches and acknowledge them from our pulpits?

As Christians, we are directed by Scripture. 1 Timothy 5:3 tells us to “take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her.” Psalm 146:9 says, “He cares for the fatherless and widows.” Psalms 68:5 says, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”

Church leaders repeat often that their desire is to know and reach our mission field. And we also know that our mission field demographics are shifting dramatically in the United States. Single-parent families are one of the largest population segments in the nation.

With that in mind, I ask these questions about your church.

•Are the leaders in your church aware of this large single-parent population group?

•Does your church have specific ministries designed for single parents? A single parents ministry is *not* the same thing as a singles ministry.

•What would your church need to do differently to reach single parents?

•What attitudes at your church would discourage single parents from feeling welcome?

•Have you attempted to connect with single parents in your church?

I wonder how long we in the church can continue to ignore this huge, and not so hidden, mission field.

If we don’t reach out to them, who will? For many, the only help they receive is from the government. Should the church be OK with this, or should we be giving them Christ? How can they make it without Christ filling them and renewing them daily?

How will your church respond?

I challenge the church to ask single parents how they feel about church. Ask them why they are not attending, why they feel unwanted, why they feel judged.

God built us to be in fellowship with other followers of Christ. He built all Christian families to be in fellowship with each other — single-parent families included.

*“He (God) defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.” — Deuteronomy 10:18-19.*

Single-parent families need a place and a season to heal and be restored. A place to gather and worship with other followers of Christ. A place to serve God alongside other followers. Will we as the church be what God truly wants us to be — a place for all followers?

*1Used with permission from “The Church and the Single Mom” by Jennifer Maggio*[*(www.thelifeofasinglemom.com*](http://www.thelifeofasinglemom.com/)*).*

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