**Singles: The Missing Link in Family Ministry by Jesse Rincones**

What images come to mind when you think about effective family ministries in a church? Do you think of a safe, secure nursery that is fully staffed? Does a vibrant children’s ministry come to mind? Do you imagine a thriving youth group with a calendar full of student events?

What about singles?

In some churches, singles become relegated to the “student ministry” or “college group.” For some church leaders, it’s difficult to think of singles as a vital part of the church family. What importance do you place on them in your church’s ministry?

According to the Census Bureau, singles now make up 44.1 percent of the adult population in America. What percentage of your church is comprised of singles? Will this growing part of your community be a growing part of your church’s family ministry?

As you think about how your church can engage singles, keep the following observations in mind.

**“Single” Does Not Mean “Same”**

Some churches create a broad umbrella called The Singles Group or Singles Ministry. Some put all singles in the simplistic category of “Too old for the youth group, but not married yet.” When the church makes the mistake of putting all singles into a monolithic group, effective ministry will be curtailed.

There’s a group of single adults that graduated from high school and are now going to college and living at home or in a dorm. There also are 33 million singles in our country who live alone. When you think about these single Americans who are maintaining households all by themselves, can you imagine the spiritual, financial and relational challenges they face on a daily basis? The body of Christ is poised to meet the need for love and community that they’re looking for, too. How could your church reach out to this group of singles?

In addition, there are people who are single because of divorce. Others are widowed. Some are now older and have never married. Understanding the diversity of the singles in your community is the first step to effectively ministering the love of Christ to them.

**Being Single is a Gift**

One of Paul’s wishes for the Corinthians was that they could be single as he was. However, he recognized that this was just his wish and not God’s will for everyone. “But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Corinthians 7:7). Some have the gift of marriage, while others have the gift of being single.

Being single is not a handicap. It’s not a holding pattern until you are able to land a spouse. Being single doesn’t mean that a person is less important than the average American household of 2.55 people.

Singleness is a gift from God. Embracing this truth changes our perspective of the status of singles. This leads to a broadening of the church’s ministry to them that is beyond just teaching on sexual purity and marriage preparation.

When singles are instilled with the idea that singleness is a gift, it can spark a revolution in family ministry. Aspects of the single life can be treasured – imagine how singles can use spontaneity in ministry. Without having to coordinate schedules with a spouse or possibly children, they are in a unique position to serve the Kingdom. A single person’s flexibility and freedom can lead to mission opportunities that are unavailable to those whose life commitments are more stringent.

Is your church helping singles explore their gift from God?

**They Are Believers First**

In a small group gathering, a young man made an enlightened observation about ministering to singles in our churches: “We should approach them first and foremost as believers, then as singles.”

I think Paul would agree. “Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them” (1 Corinthians 7:17). As Christians, we are believers first, and then we are singles, married, employed, elderly, students, or whatever other identifier we may use in this season of our lives.

Consequently, singles need the same things every believer in your church needs: love, acceptance, community, mercy, instruction, correction, discipleship, and an opportunity to use their gifts in ministry or missions.

As you begin to discover how churches can minister to and with singles, keep these simple principles in mind. First, singles are not all the same – discover the diversity within this group. Second, singleness is a gift, just as marriage is a gift. Finally, while all singles should not be viewed as alike, they do need the same things every believer needs.

May God grant us the wisdom to minister to all in God’s family, including singles.

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