[Singles conference doubles as spiritual retreat](http://thecourier.com/family-news/2017/02/11/singles-conference-doubles-as-spiritual-retreat/)

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Singles wanting “Something More” can check out a conference being hosted at Findlay’s New Life Assembly of God Church.

The Something More New Life Singles Conference will be held March 25 with keynote speaker Kris Swiatocho, director of The Singles Network Ministries.

“I think there’s not enough out there for singles,” said New Life member Kim Dennis, who came up with the idea for the conference and is part of its eight-member planning group.

Dennis has been in singles ministry off and on for years. The idea for the conference came to her last year after some prayer “and reading in the Bible, of course.”

She said many single people are “very lonely” and said it can help to meet people, even if it’s just as friends. When she moved to Findlay, “I really prayed that God would send me Christian friends.” She has since found them.

Dennis and her group are reaching out to singles from Ohio, Michigan and Indiana. She said the goal is for singles to find the “Something More.” Maybe they’re looking for a romantic partner, or maybe they want to change jobs. “Maybe they just have a lot of chaos going on in their life,” she said.

Dennis said they define “single” as anyone 18 and older who was never married, or is divorced, widowed, dating but not married, a single parent, or a singles ministry leader.

She said if you’ve never married, people make assumptions: “Why aren’t you married? What’s wrong with you?” But maybe nothing is wrong, and you just haven’t found the right person.

“Wherever you go, it’s all about couples,” she said. You see people holding hands, or you go out to dinner and see couples demonstrating affection. “We want that,” but when that happens is in God’s hands, she said.

Dennis said church is just one place that can be awkward if you’re newly divorced and sitting by yourself.

She added a lot of times, churches have a youth group and a college group but, though churches don’t do it on purpose, older adults “kind of fall through the cracks.” She said if you go to a bigger church and you don’t get connected to a Bible study or another group, “Then how do you meet Christian singles, especially if you’re not an outgoing person?” Even if you go to a singles Bible study, if it happens to be all women, then how do you meet a man, or vice versa, she said. And at smaller churches, there may be only two singles, total.

**Mix and mingle**

At the conference, people will be encouraged to mingle, Dennis said. Usually when people attend an event with a group they stay in their little group: “‘Make sure you sit by me, because I don’t want to sit by some weird guy.’ … And I do it, too.”

She said it was scary the first time she went to a singles event, in Michigan four years ago. A friend was supposed to go with her but she wasn’t able to. Dennis knew a male friend was going, but thought that would be awkward. She was uneasy but decided to go ahead and go, “and I am so thankful I did.”

Dennis was assigned a roommate at the conference and the moment they met, “It was like we knew each other for years.” The two women were euchre partners and the people they were playing against swore there was no way they had just met, as they appeared to be sending signals.

“We beat the socks off of them,” she said.

They’ve remained good friends since.

Dennis said Swiatocho, the keynote speaker, will bring humor to the conference.

Swiatocho has been in full-time ministry for about 18 years, traveling, speaking and teaching. She does many types of events but said, “My heart is singles ministry.”

She said the need is great and there are more singles than ever before. But churches are often led by married men, and they tend to draw people similar to themselves, primarily families with kids.

“They forget that married people come from two single people,” Swiatocho said.

Swiatocho educates pastors on who singles are and are not. When she tells someone she is single, she isn’t implying that she is out to hook up, or that her singleness has anything to do with her appetite for relationships — it just means she is not married.

Swiatocho said people don’t want to say they are single, “because it’s like saying you’re pathetic or you’re lonely. … It’s just marital status.”

And she said just because you are single doesn’t mean you don’t have a family, noting that this could encompass nieces, nephews and parents.

Swiatocho works with lay people like Dennis who also have a heart for singles. Single people may be diverse: a single mom who cannot pay the bills; a man married 40 years, newly widowed and finding himself alone; a 27-year-old who wants to get out from living with parents; a 40-year-old who wants to be married, “and now the baby years are almost done.” So, Swiatocho said, she’s sensitive to different factors and aspects of singleness.

“Over half our country is not married,” she said.

Swiatocho said there’s no reason anyone cannot start a singles ministry, as the resources are there, noting that her website has resources available.

“It’s just spiritual warfare. … The enemy does not want singles to come into community,” or come to church, she said.

And more and more of the secular world “devalues marriage” and says it’s OK to just live with someone, she said.

The conference is called Something More as, often, “Singles want something more” but are not doing their part to get it, she said. A lot of times people may say they want something more — a better job, say, or more friends — but not look at why that hasn’t happened, she said.

Swiatocho said there is a hope that God will just instantly give you an amazing man: “Poof!” But maybe, in fact, you need to work on you. She will present on this at the conference.

Swiatocho said she tries to make these things real to people, but to do so with humor.

She tells singles “Hey, I’m on this journey with you. … I know what it is to be lonely.” Hopefully people will leave encouraged, and feel they have made some friends.

“And maybe their life will just change,” she said.

**‘Jesus: Single Like Me’**

Swiatocho has written a Bible study called “Jesus: Single Like Me.”

She said a long time ago, God gave her that title. She started reading the gospels, wondering whether Jesus’s singleness made a difference. But God told her to put it on the back burner, and there it remained for 10 years. She spent eight months looking at topics related to Jesus’s singleness and realized why she hadn’t been able to write the series 10 years earlier: “I had to live it.”

For example: “Jesus had friends of the opposite sex, but he had boundaries,” Swiatocho said. But, she said, she couldn’t have written that chapter until she herself had male friends she was not dating.

“I never hear sermons on Jesus being single,” Swiatocho said.

She said people see singleness as something bad, but there are advantages. Jesus didn’t have to ask his wife whether he could do things, and being single allowed him to travel anywhere, without having to ask anyone’s permission, she said.

She said singles who look at being single as “poor me, poor me,” maybe aren’t looking at it the right way. She said people may be missing a relationship with God and with friends. And, if you build a community of people around you and build friendships, perhaps one of them will turn into that special someone.

“But if not, you’ve got a really cool group of friends that love you,” Swiatocho said.

Swiatocho will speak at three sessions. There will be small discussion groups and a light lunch.

The conference runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with doors opening at 9:30. It will be followed by a dinner catered by Kathy’s Korner, then comedy in the evening. Attendees can sign up for just the conference, just the comedy, or both.

Registration is $50 for the conference and comedy combo package (which includes snacks, lunch and dinner); $40 for the conference only (including snacks and lunch); or $20 for comedy only (no meals included). Registration can be made online and the deadline to order tickets is March 4.

Scholarships may be available for those who cannot afford the registration fee. The deadline to submit scholarship applications is listed as Feb. 1, but Dennis said they will try to accommodate people.

“We don’t want to turn anybody away,” she said.

And, she said, New Life’s “awesome worship team” will be at the conference. She said the church welcomes everyone and gives them a “sense of belonging.”

“It’s not my conference,” Dennis said. “It’s God’s conference. I want to give Him the credit, because He’s the one who started all of this.”

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