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**How to Start a Single and Young Adult Ministry
*by Kris Swiatocho***

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**Note:** While this information is designed to start a ministry within the church, many principles apply to starting a single or young adult ministry outside the church. Today most single and young adult ministries are started with volunteers without any pastoral leadership or covering of a church. While they can still be very successful using the principles below, keep in mind I would encourage you to always start a singles or young adult ministry under the church and its leadership

*Caution of “Starting a Singles and Young Adult Ministry” outside the church leadership:*

1. You may need to qualify your leadership and background because you lack pastoral or church cover. If you put someone in authority to lead your group and/or teach their Spiritual maturity, what they believe, and their background is critical in lining up with yours.
2. You are liable (unless you have your ministry insurance) if someone has an accident on your property or there is an issue with children.
3. If you plan on having children at your events, including Bible studies, you need to have a way to check the backgrounds of child-care workers. I suggest not having children at your event who are not watched personally by their guardians.
4. When it comes to conflict in your ministry, asking people to leave, protecting existing members, not having a church to step in, protect, etc., leaves you vulnerable.

**BASICS STATS**: What do we know about singles in our country? Around 54% of the population is single (including anyone 18 years or older, divorced or widowed, based on the 2020 census report. This varies depending on what city and state you live in. A large city like Washington DC has a singles population closer to 65%, whereas a small town might have 35%. A retirement area will likely have a high percentage of singles, but they might be over 65.

**Factors that affect the singles population:**

• Higher employment and educational opportunities

• Military base, retirement community close by

• Size of a town or city and location

• The number of churches/ministries nearby and the openness to reach singles.

So, if most cities average at least 50% of single adults, the church should also be at 50%, right? Unfortunately, most churches are around 30% single (with most of this percentage being very young singles or over 60). The percentage is even lower if they have a pastor who focuses only on single adults.

**Note:** There are less than ten full-time singles\* pastors of all ages, gender, and denomination, left in the US. In Europe and other parts of the world, there are even less. Many pastors today have multiple hats that may include singles without the title of singles pastor, including education and small group. Some churches provide great resources such as Intentional Relationship for Singles, Divorce Care, Single and Parenting, Smart Step-Families, Grief Share, and Celebrate Recovery, ministering to the single population.

\*Most churches of 1000 or more in size usually have a pastor or staff member of young singles 18-30.

**Who is leading the majority of singles and young adult ministries today?** Volunteer leaders make up 95% or more of all singles ministries. Some volunteers are under a pastor or church, but most are outside the church. Social media apps are important tools that these ministries use to reach singles.

**So, what else do we know about singles in relation to the church today?**

**• Single, never married is the largest group (mainly young adults).** They have the *most flexible use* of their time and money and are usually the least used and reached in the church.
**• Single-parent families** have the *least flexible use* of their time and money and usually have the most needs in the church. The majority of these ministries cater to single moms, leaving out any focus on single dads.
**• Singles from 18-30 prefer to be called young adults.**  They say they aren’t single; they just aren’t married yet.
**• Singles 30-45 are the missing age group in most churches.** Today most churches offer ministry to young singles 18-30. They might offer a singles Sunday school class or small group; however, the age group usually ends up for singles over 45-50. A median-aged single rarely wants to hang out with someone who could be their parent or child.

**Q: If the number of singles in our country is so high, why isn’t the church doing more to reach them? Why aren’t they hiring more singles pastors?**

**a: Singles and young adult ministry is difficult.** Single adults come in such a wide age range with huge differences in life stages, needs, goals, etc.; it’s hard to simply develop one plan that fits all. Even among young singles, a 19-year-old in college living at home has little in common with a 25 single mom or a 29 who owns their own home.

**b. Singles’ lives change often:**Even if you start a ministry, their lives change, and as a result, the ministry will too.

• Some single and young adults get married

• Some leave your ministry to serve in another ministry

• Some move/leave your church, and you don’t always know why

• Some will come to your church or ministry, seeking a amate. If there isn’t anyone or a ministry to draw singles, they leave

• Some never grow up or mature; often, they have a variety of life issues; they might still be living at home into their thirties

• Some come for a handout only, meaning they are there to get something from you without giving or serving.

**c. Lack of leadership:** Finding a pastor with experience ministering to singles is hard. Often they have been married their whole life and don’t relate. Singles ministry takes time to develop. If a pastor isn’t ready to put years into the work, the ministry has to be restarted over and over.

**d. Past experience:**

• Because some churches have failed at the singles ministry, they are hesitant to start again for whatever reason.

• Some church’s singles ministries, due to lack of leadership, became a meat market.

• Some churches have a lot of unhealthy singles, making it challenging to keep healthy coming back, affecting growth.

• Some churches can’t find healthy, mature leaders.

• Their current leadership got married and left, and they didn’t have any others trained to take over.

• Some churches feel singles shouldn’t be separated for any reason, meaning they don’t understand their needs. Note: While I agree we need to serve the Lord together, we sometimes need ministry specific to our life stage. In the same way, there are ministries for married adults, young parents, women, men, etc.

**So, does this mean singles ministry is doomed? That can’t be done and done well?** The population of single adults continues to increase while the ministry to singles, led by the church, is decreasing. This does leave a huge opportunity to reach this demographic. A demographic that can help build the church. Build it in numbers, in resources, in serving, in tithing, and even in marriages. It takes a calling from God, leadership, prayer, determination, and many people to help.

**So, to make sure we are on the same plate, let’s first define the purpose of singles ministry:**

**•** To reach a group of people that might not come into the church another way. It is simply a gate.

• A place to build friendships, get healthier, and grow.

• It’s a place that provides mutual support for a particular life stage, whether it’s a single parent, divorced, widowed, or never married.

• A place to meet their future spouse.

• A place to learn how to be a volunteer, serve, and/or become a leader.
**Note:**Every church is called to reach singles, but not every church is called to start a singles ministry.

**So, where do you start?**

1. **Continue to pray personally, affirming this is God’s direction for you.**Why do you want to start a singles and/or young adult ministry? What goals or missions do you have? What do you hope to accomplish? Are you just wanting friends to go to dinner with? Is it to find a mate? Is it to grow the church? The kingdom? Are you willing to wait and gather the right co-leaders first? Have you found out how many singles actually live in your area and their demographic? What does your pastor think? Friends?

**Singles and young adult ministry is not a place to:**

• **To give them a social club.** If I have seen and heard this once, I have seen and heard it 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 will eventually die.

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 that people will ask each other what they are doing for the weekend. I promise you; the social side will come from the right foundation. Then, when you do have a social, it becomes a “strategic fellowship.”

**Note:** A strategic fellowship is a gathering that might appear as a social event, but it is really strategic in that you have leaders scattered throughout, name tags, a sign-up list, creative ways to meet and involve new people, follow-up plans, etc. It’s a gate to meet new folks to get them to your Bible study, leadership training, and/or church.

• **To only get singles married, although heaven forbid, singles meet someone in church!** We do want singles and young adults to find the “one” in church, but we first want them to know Christ. We want them to be as healthy as possible. If getting them married is your only goal, you are in trouble. But on the other side, if we don’t acknowledge that 99% of all singles want to get married, then we are not planning for the type of ministry to help educate and nurture them in that direction. A great new resource to help in this is the study “Intentional Relationships”; go to [www.IntentionalRelationshipSolutions.org](http://www.IntentionalRelationshipSolutions.org)

• **A competition or a comparison to other singles or young ministries.** Do not allow your past (or other people’s past) to dictate your direction or focus. Numbers and activity should never replace personal growth and leadership development.

**Singles ministry is a way to:**

• Develop an effective outreach to the growing number of single adults in your church and community.

• Enhance church growth and help fulfill the Great Commission

• Help renew the vision and purpose of your congregation

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

**Note:** Single and young adult ministries must 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 try 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.

1. **Continue to do research.** Talk to other singles ministry leaders for advice. Go to [www.TheSinglesNetwork.org](http://www.thesinglesnetwork.org/) , watch videos, download resources, purchase *The FAQ’s of Singles Ministry book, Leaders that Last 6 Week Leadership Training*, etc. Spend as much time as you can learning what to expect so you can develop your plan.
**Note:** Also attend the Labor Day Singles and Leaders Retreat; www.LaborDaySingles.org

*Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*

1. **Talk to your pastor (those over you) about your calling and have a plan to give them.**You will need the support of your church for greater success. **Note:** An excellent resource at [www.TheSinglesNetwork.org](http://www.thesinglesnetwork.org/) on setting up a plan to talk to your pastor.
2. **Involve others, including male/female leaders who have the same calling.** If you are on staff, you can be male or female, but your leadership team needs a demographic equal to who you feel led to reach. If you are a volunteer, you must be sure you co-lead with the opposite sex.
**Note:** The initial team of leaders may or may not be the team leading the ministry. They simply may help you at the start for direction.

**Caution: If you are a women-only, lead ministry.** Women start the majority of all singles ministries. The only problem is over time, women statistically only draw other women unless they have a male co-leader. If a man walks into a class/small group or gathering and sees only women running the ministry, they will not return. You might want to get a married couple to help lead, preferably one who has been divorced and remarried. This can help at the start until you can grow more men.

**Note:** For ideas on how to recruit men into your ministry, go to [www.TheSinglesNetwork.org](http://www.thesinglesnetwork.org/)

**5.**    **Once you find others, start meeting weekly to:**

• Pray about the ministry, including direction, how to grow the ministry, leadership training, logistics, target audience, budget, marketing, and how you want to start, whether it’s a Bible study, service project, Sunday lunch, etc.

• Develop your mission statement/goals/name (this will change as your ministry grows.)

• Develop job descriptions of your existing and future team. (Free list at www.TheSinglesNetwork.org)

• Share any resources you have found.

• Discuss any issues or problems that need to be resolved.

• Involve the prayer ministry of your church for additional prayer.

• Allow the Lord to change direction if need be.

**Note:** While you can pray for your individual needs, this meeting is not designed for that. It’s designed to pray for specific things related to the ministry.

*Psalm 37: 5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.*

1. **Develop and expand the team:** Leadership development is crucial to the success of your ministry. A lot of ministries are ***relationally structured***. Meaning they all just show up and help each other. While this is nice, and everyone is helpful, it doesn’t promote growth. Your ministry needs structure, so you build a team that also builds a team. Everyone has a job and knows what is expected. They also are prepared to train the next person to take their place.

You need to develop leaders based on the needs of the ministry. For example, starting a Bible study at the church, you will need teachers, greeters, hospitality, prayer, marketing, follow-up, and facilities leaders. If your Bible study is just starting, you might combine some jobs until more people join.

**Note:** Be careful who you put on your team as a leader. It may be better to have them serve first; then, as time goes on and you train them, they can become leaders.

*Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

1. **Develop public relations**

Getting your pastor, staff, married adults, and even singles to support God's vision is important. They need to see and experience the value of your ministry's asset to the church and community. They will keep it and help promote and support it if it's a value.

**Ideas towards this goal:**

• Attend leader’s meetings in your church and share the vision and any success stories.

• Ask the church for a list of singles; work with the church secretary to qualify them

• Speak at married Sunday school/small group classes and have them share at your class.

• Serve on leadership teams where you get to share about the singles.

• Have you singles served on mission teams and help with service projects?

• Develop marketing materials to help promote your ministry, such as website/web page, logo, brochure, name tags, Facebook page, Meetup.com, Instagram, etc.

• Attend any local associational meetings to share about the ministry

• Work with local counselors, Divorce Care, Griefshare, and Celebrate Recovery ministries so you can partner.

**8.**    **Housekeeping:**

• Continue to evaluate the ministry and adjust as needed.

• People will come and go despite how amazing you or the ministry has become.

• Develop a plan for conflict and how to handle unhealthy singles.

• Meet with your pastor regularly to share the good things that are happening

• Accept help; learn to delegate

• Take care of yourself; grow in your relationship with the Lord. If you aren’t healthy, then you can’t lead anyone else.

• Patience! Remember that God is in control. We must -- in our enthusiasm -- be sensitive to His timing and His will. Stay open to God’s continuing leadership. Your ministry should change as the needs and methods dictate. Enjoy and remember some days will be challenging, but overall it can be the most rewarding ministry.
**Note:** Suggest reading the Book of Nehemiah and following his model of waiting on God.

*Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

Bring Kris to your city to speak in person or by Zoom at your next event. Call her at 919.434.3611.

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