

Single adults represent tremendous mission field

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A hidden mission field exists—one that encompasses more people than live in many small countries. And it could be just outside the walls of any given church.

Single adults make up more than 40 percent of the U.S. population, according to some studies, and [Dennis Franck](#) believes church members just need to open their eyes to see them.



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"We're becoming a single nation," noted Franck, national director of single adult/young adult ministries for the Assemblies of God.

And, he admits, he didn't really see singles until he became a youth pastor in the 1970s and started seeing them all around him—at church, at community events, in the grocery store.

"My wife and I started listening to their stories ... and saw the need," he said.

Part of the inability to see singles as a unique group is because churches, for the most part, are family-focused.

"Churches are very family-oriented," noted Linda Hardin, the single adult ministry consultant for the [Church of the Nazarene](#). "That's both a good and a bad thing."

Congregations need to minister to families, but, Hardin pointed out, singles can feel left out.

"I want to strengthen families ... but not to the exclusion of the needs of singles," Franck agreed.

Both denominational workers added the singles population will continue to grow, particularly as aging baby boom-ers divorce or are widowed.

"We are becoming a singles nation," Franck said. He defines singles as unmarried adults, aged 18 and older, who are singles by "chance, change or choice, whether theirs or someone else's."

Personal experience opens some eyes to the need. Tommy West had been in the ministry 30 years when his marriage unraveled. Because he had been serving in Georgetown and knew the Central Texas city, he decided to remain and joined [Crestview Baptist Church](#).

Single again, he joined Crestview's single adult Bible study group with about 30 members. Within about six months, he became the teacher. Later, the church called him as part-time singles minister, and then as full-time minister of education. "Still there was that core group ... and some of that group is still in ministry," he said.

Even when a congregation recognizes the group, members often aren't sure how to minister to and with singles. "A lot of churches have a college and career class and think that, therefore, 'We have a singles ministry,'" West said.

To be effective, ministry to the group must take into account singles' needs. Churches even must recognize the difference between young adult and single adult ministries. Most young adults, those 18 to 25 years old, don't usually describe themselves as single, but rather refer to themselves as not married yet, Franck explained.

He promotes ministry to two groups—singles 18 to around 30 and those 30 to 60 years old—with flexibility as life stages change. Some remain with the first group past age 30, and some stay with the second group after 60 rather joining a maturing adult ministry.

Regardless of age, the key is to meet needs—particularly for friendship and socialization. Singles are "looking for closeness. ... They're looking for commonality, not just marital status," said Stacey Hamby, a single parent and a member of [Pleasant Valley Baptist Church](#) in Liberty, Mo.

"So many are lonely, especially single-agains. ... Many have almost become recluses," West said. "Many are hungry for relationship, ... and many, I think, are looking for and are hungry for a faith relationship."

About three years ago, West discovered Chuck, a man living in his car on Crestview's parking lot. Chuck was angry over his situation and had not been in church for about 30 years. But as he was drawn into the singles

ministry, "he made the connection horizontally (with people) and vertically (with God)," West said. Now Chuck works for the church.

Franck also sees friendship as common to singles, regardless of age. "They go home to an empty apartment. They need same- and opposite-sex friendships," he said. "Churches need to provide opportunities. If the churches don't, where will they (singles) find it? I believe churches have dropped the ball."

But singles must remain aware they need more than connections with other singles, Hardin noted. "There must be balance. Singles have got to have both single and married friends, and they even need that balance in church life."

While singles perceive different needs as their life stages change, they share other common needs. Not all single individuals want to marry, but many do. Franck believes they need discussions about healthy dating and healthy marriage. Some need premarital counseling. Others who have been divorced or widowed may need re-marital education.

They need opportunities to discuss major life issues—intimacy, finances, parenting, employment and other needs—from a single perspective, Franck added.

And whether they recognize it or not, singles need opportunities for service. Many who have been deeply wounded can find renewed compassion through helping others. "Service opportunities are important because people in general are selfish, by nature and by necessity. Singles especially are selfish by necessity ... because they have to do everything for themselves," Franck said.