

Single Minded Devotion: Unmarried Ranks Offer Ministry Opportunities

by John Kennedy
Pentacostal Evangel

As never before, singles in America are putting their mark on society in everything from dining habits to car designs. The 2000 U.S. Census revealed that for the first time there were more single-member households than traditional families.

More than 27 million Americans, or about 10 percent of the overall population are singles living alone.

This accounts for one in four households, more than those headed by married couples with children (under 25 million) according to Census data.

Most single adults live with someone else, perhaps a roommate or relative such as a child or parent. When counting all single adults in the United States – those who have never married, or are divorced, separated or widowed, the total mushrooms to 82 million. This includes 6 million cohabiting couples.

Only three decades ago, 70 percent of American households contained a married couple. That has declined to 52 percent.

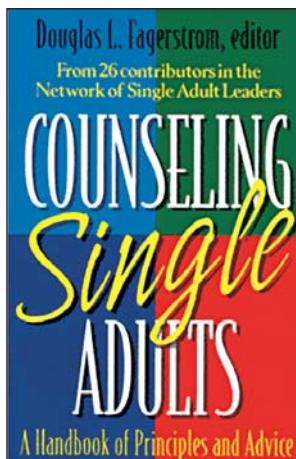
“Society in the past has been geared for families,” says Tom Coleman, 53, head of the new Glendale, Calif., secular advocacy group American Association for Single People. “People weren’t seen as individuals, but as part of extended family. We want singles to be respected for who they are.”

Madison Avenue certainly has taken notice of the largest unmarried adult population in U.S. history. But Christian single adult ministry experts say denominations have been slower to respond to the needs of single adults.

“Singles are the most dominant factor in American society today,” says Colorado Springs pastor consultant Rich Hurst, 49, co-author of *Deepening Your Walk: A Spirituality for Single Adults*, and *Giving Ministry Away: Empowering Single Adults for Effective Leadership*. “Singles by and large aren’t in church. If the church wants to [thrive] this century, it’s going to have to get serious about reaching single adults.”

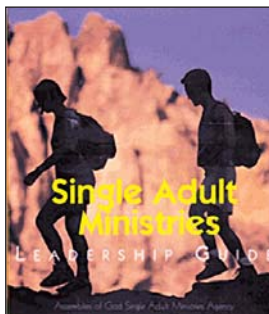
The Assemblies of God saw the need and organized a national Single Adult Ministries office based in Springfield, Mo.

“If the church is to be effective in reaching, nurturing, disciplining and training adults, we can’t avoid singles,” says Dennis Franck, 50, director of the agency.



“Demographics in this country are demanding that we do something,” he says.

Franck, who has worked in single adult ministries for 23 years, says the spiritual needs of singles, such as prayer and worship, are the same as for married adults. But the personal needs are much different on topics such as sexuality, relationships, career choices, and church identity.



Franck says while there is nothing wrong with the Fellowship’s longtime family-oriented emphasis, congregations shouldn’t inadvertently exclude singles.

Harold Ivan Smith, author of *Young Adult Ministry: The NeXt Generation* and *Reluctantly Single*, says that conventional programs may not appeal to unchurched singles.

“There is a growing subculture that certainly doesn’t see the traditional church as important to them,” says Smith, 54, of Kansas City, Mo.

However, Smith says that the uncertainty after last year’s terrorist attacks presents a great opportunity for the church to reach the growing ranks of singles.

“For many, September 11 heightened their awareness of their singleness,” Smith says. There is a real sense of aloneness. A lot are asking where they can find meaning in life. Working long hours to get ahead in their career is no longer a priority for many.”

Ultimately, Franck says, single adults come to understand they can be effective and complete without being married. Rather than maintain that distinction of being an individual, single adult ministries are designed to integrate singles into mainstream activities of the church, such as greeting at the door, singing in the choir and helping in the nursery. ▲▲

(This article is based on excerpts from a story appearing in the February issue of Pentacostal Evangel, a publication of the Assemblies of God USA.. Although AASP is a secular organization, we periodically share information on faith-based groups which are reaching out to single people.)

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