

## WHITEPAPER: History of Singles and the church

### WHY ARE SINGLES GROUPS NEEDED?

To answer that question we have to take a look back into history:

#### 1950's

Back in our parent's generation, prior to the 1960's, churches were the center of the community.

*"Churches and schools were being greatly expanded to accommodate the growing population, and organized religion was in its heyday. On a typical Sunday morning in the period from 1955-58, almost half of all Americans were attending church – the highest percentage in U.S. history. During the 1950s, nationwide church membership grew at a faster rate than the population, from 57 percent of the U.S. population in 1950 to 63.3 percent in 1960."* [Source](#)

Post WWII surge in the marketplace and the rise of the white picket fence communities brought people together in their churches and community centers. With dances and places to meet, it meant singles also had a safe place to meet.



#### 1960's & 1970's

Troubles in society – segregation, rise of feminism, Vietnam War just to name a few – began to affect communities and the traditional denominational church structure. Christians began seeking more answers and had the desire for a more non-traditional setting to express their religious freedom set apart from the troubled society. The Jesus movement helped create the rise of the nondenominational church and associated Christian groups began.



*“Parachurch groups including Youth For Christ and Operation Mobilization empowered many young people for mission, while Campus Crusade for Christ built on the Jesus People momentum by training a massive 30,000 people in evangelism at Spree 73.” [Source](#)*

These groups and the new type of nondenominational church that opened its doors replaced the troubled community centers. Young people flocked to these new churches and youth groups and singles groups flourished as a result.

### 1980's and 1990's

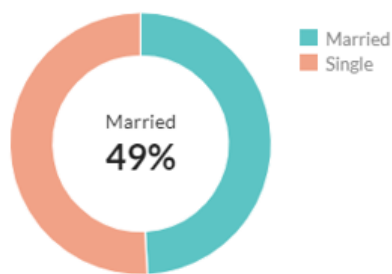
The growth of the nondenominational churches continued. The young pastors that started the nondenominational churches now started having their own families. Children's ministries became a big focus: the need for quality programs to help families raise their children. The singles that benefitted from the surge in the 1970's started getting married as well. Ranks of married couples grew and numbers of singles started declining. Churches started dropping singles ministries in favor of more programs for children and youth. Traditional Denominational church membership started dropping as more families migrated to the nondenominational churches with the family focused programs.

In the late 90's books on alternative dating ideas became vogue, which were meant to be courtship instruction for families who had young adults starting to enter the dating world. Singles of all ages embraced this as Christian curriculum which had the negative effect of causing older singles to stop dating and seeking courtship instead. Men began going “underground” (and eventually online) rather than finding their spouse in church so they weren't under the microscope of having to court instead of date. Men/women relationships got awkward in the church because the “expected” behavior was courtship instead of dating.

### 2000's to present

The children of the 90's were becoming youth resulting in churches putting more emphasis on youth ministries. Second generation children were now having children so churches also focused on children's ministry again. At the same time, marriage rates were declining and divorce rates were surging resulting in record numbers of singles in society. Singles however were and are leaving churches in droves because they had become too family focused. Singles ministries continued to decline to almost non-existent today. **While there are a record number of singles in society today the church has not risen to the occasion to meet their needs.**

Marital status



\* Universe: Population 15 years and over

Majority Singles: [2017 census data for MD](#)

## WHAT DOES A CAREER AGED SINGLE ADULT (AGES 35-65) LOOK LIKE TODAY?

- **Busy with Career and living alone:** They are busy with careers and then come home to an empty house not able to discuss the day with anyone and no one by their side to pray with when going through a difficult struggle. Chores are not shared. They have more demands and responsibilities than a married couple because they are doing it all vs it being divided between two people.
- **Family looks different:** Their parents are getting older and they are now being called upon to fill the role of caretaker and patient advocate for them. Some have lost one or both parents. Their siblings are probably married and have families and busy lives. They may no longer have time to hang out with the single sibling.
- **Holidays & special events are lonely:** Holidays are lonely unless they have other friends or family to spend it with. If the married siblings have in-laws, they may spend holidays with them instead of the single. Everyone else's weddings, births, graduations are celebrated and the single attends alone. No one celebrates the single.
- **Many layers:** They are often "The Singles": one monolithic block of unmarried people. But there are as many stages and seasons to the single adult life as there are for married adults. A single woman in her 40s or 50s with a demanding career caring for elderly parents is not equivalent of a recent college grad who is still living at home nor is it similar to a retired person.
- **Given up on church:** Large numbers have given up on church because it is primarily family/couples focused.
- **Being single long term is hard:** Extended singleness is a form of suffering. There is an appropriate time for mourning with those who mourn. This is especially true for women who see the window of fertility closing on them without the hope of bearing children. Don't minimize the cumulative years of dashed hopes for unmarried adults.
- **Nowhere to meet someone:** We live in a couple's culture and Christian singles are stuck in the middle of a hookup society and the church that says it's not ok. Most Christian singles desire to have a companion who knows them, teams with them, and is intimately connected to them. Unless there is a way to meet someone at church (with no structure to do so), where do they meet someone to date? They don't want to hang out at the bars to meet someone and online dating is often the only option but that is fraught with issues. It is difficult to be an older single and have very few to no options to meet someone.

## HOW SINGLES GROUPS CAN HELP BRIDGE THE GAP

- CONNECT Christian singles to one another to build a sense of community with healthy relationships.
- Encourage singles to PLUG INTO a local Bible-teaching church that focuses on the Gospel message of grace through Jesus Christ.
- REACH OUT to unchurched or de-churched singles where they are, to share the Good News of Jesus, and help singles reconcile to God through His Son Jesus Christ.
- Provide opportunities for singles to SERVE GOD alongside others in a similar life stage, with similar life experiences and common value.