

Parenting Alone

Ministering to Single Parents

After reading that "3 out of every 20 women in America" are single moms and that "less than 1% of 300,000 Christian churches in the country have single parent support groups", I began a quick search to find resources within the Adventist church to help us connect, affirm, encourage, and support these women who find themselves in a role they probably never expected. While I found many resources for singles, most focused on living single and/or serving adult singles, but did not focus on parenting alone.

First, single parent families can come in a variety of ways. Parents going it alone because of divorce or death. Military spouses who are temporarily parenting single during deployment. A mom who has chosen to foster and/or adopt children on her own. Their children may be young or teens. They may have a great local support system with family and friends or not know many people around them.

They are not all in our churches. One stat said that only 33% of single moms attend church. This makes ministering to single parents a great outreach opportunity.

But imagine how hard it might be for a single mom to come to church Sabbath morning: juggling the kids, getting everyone ready, and walking into a family-oriented atmosphere. (And many of us have come to church feeling messy and less-than as we compare ourselves to everyone else dressed up in their Sabbath-best and smiling. Single moms do that, too, and may also feel guilty and looked down on.) We can begin building relationships and making our churches feel like a safe place by offering support and relevant resources at times that work best for single moms--and by providing childcare for all of our events. We don't always need to plan things specifically for single parents, but offering childcare makes it more doable for her to attend.

Getting Started

Many of us get excited and start brainstorming ideas and making plans--then wonder why no one attends our wonderful events. It's possible the idea is wonderful and fun to us, but not quite as enticing to others. So first step, talk to single parents and find out what they need and want.

Create a team that will focus on connecting with and supporting single moms that also includes a couple of single parents on it--and people who parented single when they were raising their children. Empower those singles to speak up and plan--they will have the best ideas of needs because they are living it or have lived it.

Pray for the single parents and their families specifically.

Don't just plan events for them alone--they already feel singled out. Plan events for the whole church and/or all women, but think through the details that will make it possible for a single mom to attend. Will they need childcare? Finances? What times work best for them? School nights probably don't work when you're the only one helping with homework and bath/bedtime schedules.

Remember their kids. They're missing a parent. Maybe there are dads or men in your congregation who will include kids in their outings, giving them the chance to experience godly men in action. (Remember that everyone who works with children need background checks!)

Ideas

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

1. Plan a parents' night out. Provide free childcare so parents can go out and do the errands (or just something fun) knowing their children are having fun, too.
2. When planning all-church events, don't emphasize couples. Make sure your description of "family" includes single parent families, grandparents, and singles.
3. Celebrate life's moments with them. Holidays. Birthdays. Mother's Day. Their children may not be able to make it special on their own, especially when they're little. Send a card. Bake a cake. Take the kids shopping or for an afternoon of baking a cake and making their own cards.
4. Offer classes and seminars on topics that are relevant to single parents: finances, home repairs, quick and healthy meals, parenting, etc.
5. Sit next to them at church.
6. Don't be critical of her kids. Get to know them. Encourage and affirm. If mom is having a hard time keeping them quiet in church, help. Sit with her and offer the kids quiet things to do.
7. Offer a Sunday Service Day when moms can bring their cars to the church parking lot for check ups, oil changes, etc. Or when the service day comes to them and helps with repairs and needs around the house.
8. Create a resource that connect moms with someone who can help when they have a need--a repair at home, a concern with their car. Who in your church is great with cars? Plumbing? Yard work? Hanging pictures?
9. Invite them for lunch or dinner or a holiday gathering. Many times we invite families that look just like we do. Young couples with kids invite other couples with kids. Adults without children tend to not invite families with kids. Families often don't think to invite singles. Switch it up. Include a variety of people around your table. It will be a blessing to them and to you.

What are you doing?

How is your church connecting with the single parents in your church and/or in your community? Send your ideas to thorst@paconference.org.