

WHAT CHURCH LEADERS CAN DO AND BE

Overview and summary

612 responded to the invitation: **If you have a Church leader or worker who has been good for single Christians, please tell us about what they have done which might prove inspiration for others.** All of which were analysed in detail.

Detailed analysis showed that 269 were not relevant to this particular question, were negative in their answer, or included lists of ideas that they wanted from their leaders. In the survey there were single church leaders and they described what they did. However, only what people actually experienced as good from their leaders was included.

It is clear from descriptions that what happens in one place may either be inappropriate or not work in another. Nevertheless there are many actions that people find helpful, varying from attitude, practical actions, *things* that happen in 'church' and the more social outside.

Top Twelve things that leaders do that single Christians say help them (in order of the number of responses, not of any implied value).

It should be noted that one network of churches has a Single Adult Ministry (SAM) which includes the majority of these.

1 Talks on relationships

Talks or series in church about relationships that include single people 44/ 343. However if the talk about singleness, many wanted a single person or someone who had been single a long time giving the talk.

In addition seven people suggested separate talks for singles workshops, weekends away, or conferences. In particular four mentioned the value of SMS text Q+A in these so people could ask honest questions anonymously from amidst the congregation (preferably through an intermediary, so also anonymous to the church leader).

2 Social and fun

The second most appreciated was organisation of social events (not necessarily by the leader as an individual) whether this was for singles (annual/monthly) or for all adults (mixed married and single).

3 Hospitality

Single people appreciated hospitality, for example Sunday lunch or feast days (Easter, Christmas) when they might otherwise be on their own. However they didn't want to be treated as a 'single' in doing so, but simply included with others in a family setting.

4 Models of Christian singleness

What sustained many single Christians was seeing a leader with a 'well-lived single life in action'. Thus ensuring that leadership included such a person, including those who may have been divorced, is greatly encouraging to people as to how live their own lives as a Christian.

5 Praying

Praying for personally or in church about the issues facing single Christians.

6 Inclusive involving in church activities

Organising church activities so that everyone is involved and singles and marrieds are treated in the same way.

7 Groups of singles

This might take a number of forms, either a temporary group, or ones specific for certain types of single person, women, support group for single divorcees, or single parent ministry.

8 Keeping in contact (SMS text, email)

Very favourable comments were made about church leaders who keep in touch and contact by using texts or email to check how people were. Whereas contact is sometimes maintained with one member of a family being asked how the others are doing, single people have to be asked directly and value being so.

9 Practical help day-to-day

Some issues about singleness are not about not being married, but practicalities like not travelling at night on one's own, being visited when ill, or dealing with divorced partners. These were mentioned, among others, as valued. For example, one person appreciated the welcome and acceptance given to her non-Christian divorced husband in church because he was father to the children attending. Another commented on the leader's creation of a network of support for her in the church.

10 Practical help in looking for a match

There are many times when single people *feel* they have reached the limit of what they can do in seeking a partner. Some leaders offered to look out for an appropriate partner. Others suggested that any person could bring their date to church to be checked out (viewed positively).

11 Knowing about singles events and groups and recommending

Practical help can be offered in terms of knowing about organisations and networks that can offer events and holidays to single Christians, without it being a dating venture.

12 Seeking the single person's viewpoint

Four spoke of how their pastor sought a single person's perspective or viewpoint and included them into talks, which made them feel included and valued.

Personal attributes of the leader

The positive words specifically associated with individual leaders were analysed. Some ideas may be implicit, implied or included in other words, but they are not presumed and only the words actually as written are analysed. They are arranged in blocks relative in order of frequency that the word was used.

Block 1

Encouraging

Giving good advice

Arranging to talk about singleness/relationships and doing so

Block 2

Listening

Accepting/non-judgmental

Open and honest (particularly about leader's own past experience)

Showing interest, care and love

Block 3

Supportive and helpful

Inspirational (as a leader)

Understanding

Compassionate and empathetic

Block 4

Realistic, practical

Respectful