

A GOOD PLACE FOR SINGLE ADULT CHRISTIANS

Summary:

Churches are appreciated by single adult Christians and considered good places to be when:

1 no differentiation is made on the basis of marital status in any way;

2 they are experienced as being:

accepting

welcoming

involving

supporting

inclusive

loving

acting as family

friendly;

3 and there are:

other single people in church

social events and activities

single leaders as role models

groups to join

talks and preaching that take account of singleness

offers of hospitality

friends in the church

activities

outreach activities

prayers for single people

Overview

Respondents were invited to say what makes their church a good place for single Christians, providing any stories, anecdotes or examples that could provide some inspiration.

1,403 respondents did so, all of which were read and a representative sample of 500 (taken in blocks of 100 from all) was analysed in detail.

Of these, 34% either said that they had nothing positive to say about their church being a good place for single people, for example, 'It isn't' or that they listed what they would like to see rather than had actually experienced.

For example:

- Unfortunately not a good place for singles (481)
- ...endless talks on children, youth, marriage, relationships, sex, dedications, engagements....the church is set up for a 'normal' life progression.....if you don't 'go' the normal route you can feel an oddity (508)
- Sadly, I have not one positive thing to say here about my Church. I am hopeful that I will meet someone through this [Christian online dating] site who will take me with him to his Church which will hopefully have more Christian values than mine currently does. If certain Churches do not start moving with the times and realise that there are loads of divorced people out there, and embrace them, mistakes and all, they are not going to exist in another 10/20 years time. (138)
- I'm afraid I can't. It gets worse as the church 'grows' and more couples/families come. The rest of us are ignored. I'm thinking of leaving - but to where?! Most churches are the same! I am too old for Youth Groups! But I do not have a disease! I am young-at-heart, intelligent, attractive, on- fire for God ...and treated as if I'm invisible! I am hurting & 'lonely' & need some of that Christian Love Jesus talks about us giving! (Yes, I give!) So, I don't know the answer...full of joy & also growing sorrow & disappointment. Please let us know if you have a good suggestion! (982)
- Oh dear, perhaps a good place for younger singles but now in my 40's it is now a family church - great as this is through outreach - but I feel less a part and am now struggling to find positive anecdotes (464)
- I do not think my church is a good place for single Christians. I would appreciate it if you could tell me of any Church that is a good place for single Christians, because then I would go to it. (1081)

A few noted that they couldn't give an answer about a church being good for a single person as they didn't see themselves as single in the act of worship:

- I find it difficult to answer some of these questions as when I go to church I am only looking for God (784)
- My church is not a place for finding a date. it is a place of worship. (787)
- My church is not a good place for singles. My church is a great place for the important things like; Jesus is central, spirit led, strong bible teachings, worship etc. Not saying that

singleness is not important, but my church doesn't have anything in place for single people. (904)

- It focusses on bible teaching not social interactions between single people. I think it can be a mistake when the church loses its' focus to satisfy legitimate needs. what is more needful is to be equipped to live for God first and then if a partner comes along, then my priorities will be in the right place. (1000)

Some were also new to a church and felt that they couldn't comment yet, or no longer regularly attended.

What do single adult Christians say makes a church a good place for them?

What do single adult Christians say makes a church a good place for them? The top factor mentioned was that the church made no differentiation between people based on their marital status, whether single never married, married, divorced or widowed.

Single adult Christians are, by and large, not asking for specific ministries, special talks and courses, or groups just for them. They want to be included fully and equally into every aspect and ministry of the church's life, just they perceive married people and families to be.

The other areas of response divided into descriptors of the church and specific attributes. Each of these is illustrated in turn. To some extent these overlap, for example a church that has many activities that people can join in with could also be described as involving. They are kept separate in the analysis in order to describe what respondents actually said.

1 No differentiation in their church between married and single people

Of those who made a positive response, 18% said that church is a good place for them as it did not differentiate on marital status in the life of the church.

Specifically too, some made mention (in order of the most to the least) that:

- Individual gifts were recognised and able to be used
- That roles and ministries were open to anyone irrespective of marital status
- That skills and talents were acknowledged and employed

For example:

- Family church - doesn't matter what your marital status (143)
- At my church singles are generally valued for what they can contribute to the life of the church. Single people have preached, run the Alpha course, run mid week groups and helped with the church administration and web site, because they are gifted, talented or skilled in these areas. The senior pastor, a married man, tries to encourage everyone in the church without regard to social status, marital status, ethnic identity or gender to contribute in whatever way they can that will benefit the whole church. (519)

- People are accepted regardless of their marital status, and not excluded from participating in leadership or ministry because they are single. (114)
- Its great in that it doesn't 'single me out'. I'm just someone saved by grace like everyone else, and they make it easy for me to get involved and feel part of the family by throwing a fellowship lunch after many Sunday services - we all bring something and its nice not having to go home alone for Sunday lunch. (425)
- The senior pastor, a married man, tries to encourage everyone in the church without regard to social status, marital status, ethnic identity or gender to contribute in whatever way they can that will benefit the whole church. (519)
- I rarely hear talk about people's marital situation in our church more about their ministry, gifts and talents - this is good godly focus for me. The Church is about community and discipleship so gender or marital status should not and does not enter into it. (1113)
- All are equal, some come as one of a partner, some with a partner. No one is bothered about one's marital status. No one has asked, either. (1160)
- Marital status is not an issue in our church; there are many opportunities for service in different areas, whether married or single, male or female, young or old, working or retired. (1290)

The way that they appreciated that no difference being made varied:

- Being blind to marital status
- Everyone treated as individual (for example in Alpha courses) rather than as a member of a family group
- That there is no compartmentalised programming for any group based on marital status

For example:

- Even couples and families present themselves as individuals (267)
- It is very accepting of everyone, regardless of their lifestyle, it includes people with (for example) former and current addiction problems, transvestites, people of a variety of ages (but mostly over 45s), so as a single person there I don't feel like the odd one out (as I do in some other churches), people are seen as people, rather than part of an accepted family unit. (720)

However, some, as we will see, liked the possibility of joining in with social activities specific for single people.

**Churches are appreciated by single adult Christians when
no differentiation is made on the basis of marital status in any way**

2 Attitude of the church

2.1 Accepting

18% of people expressing positive messages about their church used the word Accepting. This was sometimes modified with three additions:

- Accepting by the church
- Accepting especially by leaders
- Non-judgmental

For example:

- My church accepts all regardless of status of relationships and I am very aware that being single has its problems as has being married - neither is better or worse - both have challenges. (775)
- Everyone is accepted especially by the leadership (755)
- My church accepts people regardless of their personal status and embraces everyone equally. (456)
- My church accepts PEOPLE and doesn't categorise them. - I personally wouldn't want to be singled out for special treatment because I was single or married or anything else. (457)
- Total acceptance, inclusion regardless. (619)
- A friendly place where everyone is accepted irrespective of background or relationship status. Plenty of social occasions/events suitable for both singles and couples/families. (619)
- Everyone is accepted for the person they are whatever their marital status is. Isn't every church like that? (1243)
- Welcoming. Accepting. Don't give trite answers like "things tend to happen when you stop looking" (which means I'm doing something wrong) and "I'm sure God's got somebody very special for you as you've had to wait for so long" (1157)

In line with other comments elsewhere, there were many BUTs added, for example being accepting, welcomed but not fully included:

- I am accepted as an individual, just not specifically catered for. (981)
- I am accepted but "feel" on occasion that my marriage break down is a whole negative area. I believe in marriage and would welcome more expression to recognise the difficulties in meeting like minded single Christian folk (968)
- Our church is warm, loving, friendly & accepting of all people regardless of age, race or singleness or not, however - I do feel as a single 40+ divorced woman that there are less ministry opportunities open to me & I don't feel I am paid as fairly as a married man would be despite the fact that I am now the bread winner for my daughter and I. (792)

2.2 Welcoming

Closely followed to Accepting was the use of the word Welcoming. 15% said they appreciated that their church was welcoming.

They reported this as being manifest in a number of ways:

- Everyone is greeted and welcomed at the door and made to feel wanted and at home. We, the church, are one big happy family. (781)
- Half an hour before the beginning of the service we serve tea and coffee and that enables people to be introduced to other people straight away and is a major way in which people are made to feel welcome. They are met at the door first and then directed to where we meet for drinks or someone goes with them. (616)
- The ethos is that all people are welcome and race, relational status, age, ability, disability, etc etc in my Church. (860)
- People very quickly made me feel welcome (learnt my name, invited me to lunch, coffee, groups) etc. (1261)
- My church is very welcoming particularly as I have come from an awkward back ground before coming a christian, having previous convictions (751)
- I have been made to feel welcome. I have found people will come up to me to say hello because they can see I am on my own. (461)
- Our church is very strong on welcoming people in regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, social standing, marital status. "Singleness" is not a particular issue over and above any other cultural boundary markers. (493)
- My church is a very welcoming church. They have always made me feel loved and part of the family. I have grown up in the church and have had support in times of difficulty. My church is good at welcoming the people whom society find difficult to deal with e.g. homeless, the mentally ill and alcohol/drug addicts (506)
- The welcome I received on my first attendance was amazing not only chocolates on entry then tea coffee (free) served, and I was introduced to a Home Group leader who then invited me to Home Group, this was six months ago, subsequently I have made friends of both single and married members of the fellowship (1220)
- It's a great church and they are very welcoming and friendly whether you are single or married. They are eager for people to find true love, but at the same time, they look out for you spiritually. (551)

Like many of the positive statements about the church being 'Welcoming' or 'Accepting', there were often reflections or BUTs attached. For example:

- I am welcomed and treated the same as everybody else. however I may move church as there are no single women my age for friendship or relationship (946)
- My church is very welcoming and friendly, though there is no particular acknowledgement of singles as far as I'm aware. I'm not sure whether some support or encouragement for

singles to meet would be helpful or patronising and potentially awkward... still wondering about this (752)

2.3 Involving

There was also strong appreciation for opportunities to be involved:

- I'm still fairly new at my current church but it seems as though you are still given the opportunity to be involved regardless of whether you are single or not (20)
- There are lots of ways to get involved in the church and not all kids work. (61)
- It has lots of organized events, that all people are encouraged to get involved in. (421)
- There are plenty of opportunities to be involved - a traditional choir, festival choir which is informal, worship group. Helping with sound, IT, Street Pastors, Drop In. (648)
- Our pastor has a heart for singles and will encourage us in leadership roles and to get involved. He has been researching how to help single people in the church. (866)

2.4 Supporting

Support is a term that indicates a more practical aspect:

- I am divorced but don't feel judged for it. I feel my children are cared about and supported by the other members. (32)
- My church recognises that involuntary singleness - particularly among women - is a problem, and it seeks to support singles to develop healthy relationships. (158)
- There are at least 10 single, separated or divorced women and two men and I don't think any one of them would feel isolated or unloved. We support each other. (249)

2.5 Inclusive

Inclusive covers two aspects: including a person and being included into activities and ministries:

- Accepting and inclusive (319)
- I now attend a church that is inclusive and friendly where everyone is accepted for who he or she is regardless of age or marital status and where the gifts of the Spirit are encouraged and practiced by all. (423)
- We strive to be an accepting community taking people as we find them and being inclusive. I feel part of a family at Inspire more than I have anywhere else. Each person is valued for who they are and given time and space to use their gifts and talents. That how church should be. (247)
- Our church is a good place for Christians whether single or not. We have a wide cross section of ages and abilities in church. All activities are inclusive and one inspirational single person has Downs Syndrome and could not be more inspirational. Her love of the Lord and ability to share and break down barriers is second to none. (368)

- It's very inclusive and healing for those coming out of difficult relationships / widows/ widowers or divorcees. (778)
- My church is extremely inclusive and they are many activities and opportunity for single people to mingle, however this has not always been the case in church life in different churches. (941)

2.6 Loving

Another word used was 'loving':

- I would say our church is a good place for singles to worship because there is a lot of empathy, love and practical help.(249)
- People in my church are very loving and welcoming, there are loads of families and little kids so its nice to have that contact. My church is hugely accepting and my minister understanding. (570)
- Loving kind looks after the poor and needy treats human beings like people (690)
- Open loving and genuinely caring (1115)

2.7 Acting as family

The image of the 'church as family' was interestingly not necessarily a cosy one, but one with a mixture of people:

- We are one family with different ages, race, ability, marital status. (35)
- Church aims to be a family like no other. There are families within the church who have welcomed me into their homes as an extended family member. (79)
- I think my Church accepts individuals as they are. It's important to get to know individuals and not to see their status but to see them as a child of God. As children of God, we are all equal. There is a good mix of young singles, young and older married people as well as older people who have either never married, or who have loss their partners. This makes us a family. We are all different and it takes God's grace for us to be able to get along with each other and love one another. By the Spirit of God we shall do this. (307)

2.8 Friendly

The last commonly used word was 'friendly':

- We are known as being a very friendly caring church for all ages (153)
- I now attend a church that is inclusive and friendly where everyone is accepted for who he or she is regardless of age or marital status and where the gifts of the Spirit are encouraged and practiced by all. (423)

Churches were appreciated by single adult Christians when being:

**accepting, welcoming, involving, supporting,
inclusive, loving, acting as family, and friendly**

3 Specific aspects of the church or church life that were appreciated by single adult Christians

There were some specific aspects of church that emerged time and again in the responses to the question. They are listed in order of frequency.

3.1 Other single people in church

By far the biggest specific aspect of the church was other single people with whom they could identify. This made them feel less 'an oddity'. For example:

- Other single people who know what you are going through but also provide a natural social group where you don't need 'another half' (29)
- I have met other single friends who have been a great support (979)
- My church is a good place for single Christians because there are so many of us! (1017)
- It's good only because the majority are singles. (1237)
- Since my husband left me and I am single I have found I have made friends with other single women, mostly divorced. It feels like we can just be and not need to explain everything. (1214)
- Lots of other singles. Less pressure to get into relationships. Less privileging of the family. Recognition of the vocations of single persons. Valuing of deep friendship. (1268)
- Quite a few singles there already. (1293)
- There are lots of single women in the church so you can have a good social network (1297)

3.2 Socials

The second specific area was the presence of socials, so that people could attend if wanted:

- Regular socials. (1186)
- Effort made to be invited out to meals, socials etc that are not consisted entirely of people in relationships. (43)
- We have a LOT of socials relevant to different age groups. We always have after parties, we always hang out after the service, we have evenings such as come dine with me where we go to random persons house and enjoy food with other guests we've never met before! (220)
- Social events and meetings (613)

3.3 Single leader

People appreciate the nature of the role model that having a single lead bring for them:

- One of our clergy who has been with our church for over five years now is in his mid-thirties and is single. This leads a good role model for single men which contradicts the notion that the church is feminine. (1228)
- On the leadership team there is a good mix of all ages, stages and singles/marrieds. Some of the strongest most full on christians in our church are singles who are comfortable in their own skin, accepted, secure and are generally brilliant role models. (230)
- In the church I go to the congregation is large with people from all parts of life, I have recently been appointed an area leader even as a single person. (963)

3.4 Groups

The fourth most mentioned areas was that of the church having groups to which one could belong:

- Mixed age house groups so you get to mix with both married and single christians and getting different perspectives from different ages. (23)
- They have connect groups where people can choose to attend anyone they feel comfortable in. Not restricted to their own parish. cafe after the service where we can have lunch and socialize. (227)
- Many of our activities, groups, meetings are not gender or status orientated and those do not necessarily inhibit participation by single. (250)
- My church is one in which everyone can feel at home with a wide range of groups available for all ages. (361)
- GREAT small groups, welcoming couples and families, excellent events. (887)
- There are a lot of families, but the focus is on lifegroups, where a person's relationship status doesn't seem to matter, because everyone works together as a family. (1040)

3.5 Talks and preaching

When preaching, inclusion of examples for people of all marital status was considered helpful, as well as having some specific talks on the subject:

- General preaching from pulpit refers to singles as well as other groups such as widows, single parents and different ages. (350)
- Preaching acknowledges the temptations and issues surrounded by singleness. (780)
- Some good talks on the subject (80)
- It acknowledges that there are singles and tries to have some optional seminar for us every now and again. (795)
- My pastor and wife are very supportive and understanding of my struggles as a single woman in the church. My pastor also preached a sermon to the church once about singleness and stressed how difficult it can be for single people. I really appreciated this and thanked him afterwards for preaching this sermon to the whole church to make them aware of this issue within the church. (1042)

3.6 Offered hospitality

Acts of hospitality are widely appreciated:

- I left my last church because it wasn't a good place for single Christians. They really didn't know what to do with me. My pastor told me, "You'll probably never get married, so I want you to look after the younger women." I found that very difficult to hear and to live up to. My present church is mixed ages and full of people from all walks of life and situations so I don't feel quite so isolated and 'odd one out'. The pastor's wife cooked me a meal recently - incredibly kind! (585)
- I never feel single at my Church I am valued, respected, included, listened to, encouraged to contribute, loved and included often in hospitality (244)
- At least some of the leadership feel we need to do something to care for the single Christians in the church - I've been invited to people's houses for lunch (including theirs) at their prompting to help include me in the life of people in the church. (795)

Acts of hospitality often are supportive in bigger ways:

- My vicar was brilliant and he noticed things e.g. if I was upset. Once, just after I was recently widowed I was about to break down after the service and he noticed, as I was rooted to the spot. He literally ran from the altar and took me in his arms whilst I broke. He also reassured everyone around because he realised what was happening. After that he and his wife had me for lunch every Friday for over a year until I was back on my feet. (291)

3.7 Friends

Although often assumed, many made explicit comments of appreciation for their friends in church:

- Friends for support. (549)
- A few years ago I prayed for friends I could have close fellowship with and began meeting in a prayer triplet with 2 other ladies (who are married) This has been a lifeline to me and an opportunity to share together at a deeper level. (17)
- My single and married friends at church are an important source of support, and fun, for me. (465)
- About 5 years ago, an initiative by a single person resulted in a one-off social event for all the known older single people in the church. From that has come a structure in which supportive friendships have been made, a smaller group meets regularly for a meal while others join up for theatre trips etc. (466)
- I enjoy a wide range of deep & significant friendships with lots of people in my church, my pastor & his wife, lots of married friends with kids, (I love it when they invite me into their families & kids lives), older, younger & same age couples & singles. (786)
- I have found excellent friends amongst other single Christians in the Church. (1284)
- My church is somewhere where I am part of a community and have friends I can be myself with and phone or drop in on if I need someone to talk to. (1218)

3.8 Activities

Activities were considered important:

- There are many ways, events and activities that keep us as singles active. (57)
- Indeed our church which is closely connected with the community has many different social activities to get involved in from bell ringing to star gazing. I guess we are very, very lucky in our village and God has really blessed us. (1228)
- Lots of activities, lunches, social evening, film club that encourage singles and couples in get involved. (954)

3.9 Outreach

Outreach activities are welcomed as opportunities for single people to make a contribution that families may find harder to do:

- Projects are more focussed on outreach to the wider community, which everyone will have the opportunity to feel they can contribute towards - especially people who are single and may have more time to get involved. (1068)
- As singles we are more able to be involved with Community outreach activities together with the older married couples without the demands of young children. (1305)

3.10 Praying

Some appreciated the fact that people prayed for them in their singleness:

- My pastorate leader and his wife pray regularly for a husband for me. Sermons don't talk only of life as a married one but make reference to singles and their struggles, or just that not everyone is. (505)
- They do pray for us, particularly those who are struggling with unwanted singleness. (562)

Churches are appreciated by single adult Christians when there are:

- other single people in church
- social events and activities
- single leaders as role models
- groups to join
- talks and preaching that take account of singleness
- offers of hospitality
- friends in the church
- activities
- outreach activities
- prayers for single people

