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A Singles' Ministry Project At The Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church In Riverside, California

Ekele Nwankwo

Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

A SINGLES' MINISTRY PROJECT AT THE MT.
RUBIDOUX SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH IN RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

by

Ekele P. Nwankwo

Adviser: Johnny Ramirez-Johnson

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A SINGLES' MINISTRY PROJECT AT THE MT. RUBIDOUX SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

Name of researcher: Ekele Nwankwo

Name and degree of adviser: Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, EdD

Date completed: May 2017

Problem

The purpose of this study was to discover, develop, evaluate, and implement a supportive singles' ministry at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church by way of planned activities and educative programs designed to serve the needs of singles in that congregation. The study was designed to determine the impact the singles' ministry has on the church and how to shape the ministry in the future.

Although society has viewed singles in different ways, depending on time and place, in traditional societies, women and men who did not marry were viewed as imperfect and lacking. Singles battle with strong expectations from family that they will

marry and have children. Painfully, they find by personal experience that in addition, the church is also geared more toward the needs of married people and children than to the needs of singles. The growing tendency of this phenomenon in the family and in the church, is the major reason for this research seeking to serve the felt needs of singles in church.

Method

The focus of this research was on single persons of both genders aged 30 and above. For this project, I used qualitative research, employing the use of questionnaires. I designed a supportive singles' ministry at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church by way of seminars, which included movies, speakers, and discussions at potluck functions; and focus group discussions. These planned activities and educative programs were designed to serve the needs of singles in that particular congregation.

Results

The study findings determined that the greatest challenge singles face is not loneliness, stigmatization of their status, or pressure to marry, although all of these were evident. The greatest challenge is rather the contradictions between the Bible value of singles and the church's negative perception of singles, as partly evidenced by exclusive language used in sermons, announcements, bulletins, social events, Bible study groups, etc.

Conclusions

While frantically searching for a ministry suited to their peculiar needs and expectations, singles are bracing the challenges of life and the limitations of the church to enhance their spirituality. Singles are searching for a ministry for singles that includes intentional activities for singles that are enjoyable, fulfilling, and spiritual. They want the church to use their talents and help to develop their potential. So that singles do not become lost in the crowd, they need a ministry to help them stay involved. There is an urgent need to create a church culture or environment that values singlehood. Local churches need to work at creating a welcoming environment for singles in which they can explore their full potential in Christ.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A SINGLES' MINISTRY PROJECT AT THE MT.
RUBIDOUX SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH IN RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

A Project Document
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Ekele Nwankwo

May 2017

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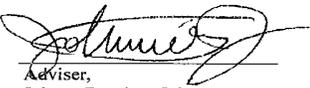
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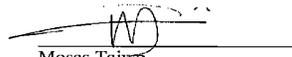
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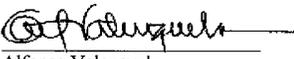
by

Ekele P. Nwankwo

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:


Adviser,
Johnny Ramirez-Johnson


Moses Taiwo


Alfonso Valenzuela


Director, DMin Program
Kleber D. Gongalves


Dean, Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary
Jiří Moskala

March 6, 2017
Date approved

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the United States living single has become an acceptable culture. An article covered by *Cable Network News* (CNN) states that there are 96 million people in the United States who have no spouse. That means 43% of all Americans over the age of 18 are single, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (Petty, 2010).

Besides being an acceptable culture, singleness is actually increasing. Similarly, in the editorial review of the book *Going Solo*, Klinenberg (2013) states:

Until the middle of the 20th century, no society in human history had sustained large numbers of singletons. In 1950, for instance, only 4 million Americans lived alone, and they accounted for less than 10 percent of all households. Today, more than 32 million Americans are going solo. They represent 28 percent of all households at the national level; more than 40 percent in cities including San Francisco, Seattle, Atlanta, Denver, and Minneapolis; and nearly 50 percent in Washington D.C. and Manhattan, the twin capitals of the solo nation. (para 3)

The pursuit of Western education and modernization is considered a phenomenon that has fostered later ages at first marriage among the youth across cultures. Moreover, spouse selection patterns are shifting from traditional family type to a more individualistic and selfish format resulting in more difficult mate selection. Higher levels of individualism, financial independence, and a feeling of invincibility in relation to age and youthfulness, time/space barriers in social interaction (demographic issues) are part of trends that have led to the emergence of an increasing number of singles in church and society who, by choice or circumstance, remain unmarried until later age.

Located in the midst of a number of institutions of higher learning, including two Seventh-day Adventist institutions, the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church in Riverside, California, has an attendance of over 1,300 people of varying ethnicity, academic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Attendees come from beyond the local county in which the church is located. In the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church, there are an estimated 250 single persons ages 30 years and above. For over two years I have been worshipping at Mt. Rubidoux. I have been a regular worshiper at this congregation and have been a part of both the health and women's ministry. Since becoming a single person, I have learned to listen to the language of single people, and I find myself also watching out for their needs and seeking ways to advocate and lead change.

The current ethnicities are predominated by African Americans between ages 25 and 60. Caucasians, Asians, Latinos, and Africans seem to be in the minority. In spite of their large numbers, singles do not have a visibly organized presence or regular activities (outside of occasional potlucks). They do not have a structured meeting agenda to identify and execute programs and events that address worship, spiritual, emotional, or social needs like the Adventist Women's Ministry (AWM), Adventist Youth Society (AYS), Pathfinders Club, or Adventist Men's Organization (AMOR) often do.

The Problem

Like couples, single people come to church to find release for whatever emotional or spiritual baggage they experience. There is no support ministry specific to singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church. Mingling in a community of like-mindedness can affect emotional health. The Christian religion enjoins people to marry or

remain celibate only if they can contain their carnal feelings and remain chaste (1 Cor 7:1- 4, 8-9). Today, the dynamics of singleness are many and varied; the causalities stem from different situations and needs. Based on the number of single adults in the church, I determined that there is a need for single persons' ministry. Singles in this study are defined as people 30 years and over who responded affirmatively to the question "I am interested in participating in a singles' ministry group." A sample size of 10 was used for this study.

Purpose and Focus

Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church does not provide a welcoming environment for singles, and there is no specific ministry or theological support for singles and those who have chosen to live solo. The purpose of this study was to discover, develop, implement, and evaluate a supportive singles' ministry by way of planned activities and educative programs that can serve the needs of singles in that congregation. This singles' ministry study took place at the Mt. Rubidoux church to provide singles a specific ministry of their own, which could be titled "Adventist Singles' ministry." An additional expected outcome was that singles would be recognized as equals in service with their married fellow worshipers who appear to be treated with more respect as they bring their talents and gifts to the worship environment.

The focus of this research was on single persons of both genders, aged 30 and above, who are living alone or have formed personal households of their own. Globally, single persons are growing in number in many cultures, especially in areas that experience high levels of Westernization. Some outstanding characteristics of singleness

include high levels of education, personal freedom, financial independence, technological exposure, career mindedness, and personal goals achievement focus.

How society views the never married varies with time and place. In traditional societies, women and men who did not marry were viewed as incomplete, social outcasts, and queer. Singleness in this post-modern era is a condition with less stigmatization compared to a heterosexual married lifestyle, thus the status of the never married remains ambiguous and often marginalized. Most negatively hit are the single women who may be seen with a negative perception because of strong expectations from family that their girl-child will, like them, fulfill or carry on the nurturing and caring roles that result from being married. For some young persons, having a relationship is viewed as cumbersome, incompatible with personal/professional development, and even secondary.

Consequently, these persons find themselves unexpectedly single. They eventually realize later that seeking a spouse becomes a task, even harder than whatever social or other status they aimed to accomplish. Going solo, therefore, becomes the conditional consequence. Painfully, they find by personal experience that the church generally tends to focus on the importance of families and children rather than on singles. The research found that the biblical view of singleness was in the affirmative (1 Cor 7:8) furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments mentioned men and women whom God used for his service. These include Elijah, Daniel, the daughters of Philip, Paul, and Jesus.

The youth of the Seventh-day Adventist church are concerned about the rapid growing dramatic trend of singleness in their ranks and the way the church views them. The growing tendency of this social phenomenon, which resides in church and society, heightened by post-modernism, is the major reason for this research. For the over 250

singles of Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church, with mixed ethnicity, there was no visible structured and regular singles' ministry that addressed the felt needs of that population. Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church is the focal church community of reference for this research.

This study did not lay emphasis on any observed psychological, emotional, or mental effects of singleness, although these effects are mentioned. Single persons often experience native feelings such as loneliness, low self-esteem and social stigmatization, whereas if the church affirms them, the positive attributes and qualities they possess become assets and great potential to enhance the church's mission to the world. Such qualities include creativity, availability, and energy. The aim of this project was to educate Seventh-day Adventist churches in particular to develop ministry programs targeted to benefit the singles population. Programs should lovingly and mutually educate people as to the advantages and disadvantages of marriage or singleness. It is the responsibility of the local church leadership to use a more inclusive language in sermons, announcements, bulletins, social events, Bible study groups, recognizing the social demographics it serves and striving to understand them in their social world. The issues of particular concern to singles should be seen as an evangelistic opportunity—a challenge to enrich their lives, thereby enhancing the quality of lives of other members because all are taken care of, and loneliness and marginalization and social distinction are eliminated. Singles, like married people, should be treated with understanding and respect, assisted, empowered, and affirmed to live joyous fulfilled lives in Jesus Christ.

Limitations and Delimitations

The results of the study are limited to the viewpoints relative to my personal experiences and those of the study participants. Delimitations of the study include a definition of singles as members of the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church who were at least 30 years old, and who responded affirmatively to the question “I am interested in participating in a singles’ ministry group.”

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the research aimed at developing, implementing, and evaluating a support program to serve the needs of singles:

1. Are singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church content with the level of singles’ activities?
2. Can singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church benefit socially from the implementation of a singles’ ministry?
3. Can singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church benefit spiritually from the implementation of a singles’ ministry?

Definition of Terms

There are a few frequently used terms in this paper. Some have meanings that are present in the literature while others have personal undertones and significances related to the focus of the study and the context of the situation. These expressions are explained as follows:

The church refers to primarily the Seventh-day Adventist church and secondarily the universal Christian church.

Culture, according to Dictionary.com (n.d.a), is defined in the noun form as “behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group.” It is used in this paper similarly to indicate social living patterns with respect to education, social maturity, and societal expectations and practices from its adult members within a particular community.

Family today has various interpretations. According to *Miriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary*, the family is “the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children; also: any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family” (n.d.). This definition is ideally the nuclear family. By function, a family is a safe environment in which the members are bound and characterized by certain objectives, practices, and decisions. Within such a unit, the needs of its members are met. By extension, the church is also referred to in this study as a family unit with a common mission, vision, and practices. According to the Christian faith, the church represents God’s family on earth. In this study, my preferred term for *family* is one that denotes the traditional family consisting of two parents and the church as family where God becomes the parent and the church his family.

Participant describes persons who are part of the population who took part in the survey used in this study. These persons were drawn from the church audience voluntarily and consented to contribute time and experience to enhance and fulfill the purpose of the study.

Single applies to various shades and understandings in modern society today. These include being socially, legally, or personally single. However, for the purpose of this study, the definition of “single” refers to “a person or individual who is not married or in any romantic relationship, but who may be single by choice or circumstance.”

Singles’ ministry, in the context of this paper, refers to catering to the special needs of persons above the age of 30 who, for whatever reason, find themselves single. This paper discusses singles ministry in light of 1 Corinthians 7:7-9 and how the body of Christ can relate to or do ministry for and among this large and growing population of the church.

Spinster is an old Middle English word that describes an unmarried woman who is considered to have passed the age of marrying. The word might be considered offensive. Most spinsters are viewed as unlikely to marry. Contemporary society describes spinsters as women who head households, live entirely alone, or never marry. The term Spinsters in this study is limited to Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe’s (2011) definition of “heterosexual, childless and non-cohabiting never married women” (p. 2), aged 30 and above.

Bachelor is a man who is not and has never been married. However, with many faces of family life today, it is not uncommon to find men living alone but who have fathered children while still enjoying “bachelorhood.” Furthermore, modern society also recognizes men who do not acknowledge common-law or any form of marriage. Unlike for females, there is no age distinction for the bachelor. However, for the purpose of this study, “single males” refers to unmarried males 30 years and over.

Summary

The “church” is missional in focus. It separates Christians from the world because Christians have chosen a citizenship that is not earthly. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14 that the “love of Christ constrains us.” It is this love that forms an attractive, adhesive bond which enables the body of Christ to intentionally develop friendships with single persons in the church. Having befriended them, the body must motivate them to cultivate friendships with others of their kind because the church stepped out and took the initiative to befriend them. Such love encourages them to offer to others the comfort which they received from the church (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Being thus equipped, singles have the freedom to share the joy of belonging, which their unchurched peers might covet and wish to understand. Thus, they could invite into fellowship those who wish to know the gospel of the crucified Christ. Contagious Christianity for single persons thus assumes a new meaning. It becomes a determination and willingness to keep and share their Christian beliefs and convictions (1 Pet 3:15).

It is the duty of church leadership to encourage and offer recognition to singles who engage persons they encounter in their daily walk to consider the Christian walk through building healthy relationships. Leadership could create function by assigning roles. Descriptive function has the potential of engendering spiritual, emotional, and psychological healing on both the giver and receiver. The God of possibility could work in mysterious ways to surprise conscientious singles with genuine relationships like new families, friends, husbands, or wives according to His purpose. Active participation in church life could trigger positive, lasting, life-long relationships for singles who ultimately desire a married life. Thus, by offering friendship and warm fellowship, and

creating function, the church can cement singles in the mission and vision of the church membership.

This chapter introduced the need to develop, implement, and evaluate a support program to serve the needs of singles at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church in Riverside, CA. It included a description of the purpose and focus of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the theological basis that explores the need for singles' ministry, based on the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

Chapter 3 presents a review of current literature on factors that affect single persons.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology used for the study, and the participants' demographics and responses.

Chapter 5 provides significance of the findings.

Chapter 6 provides evaluation of the findings, results of implementation, and specific recommendations for pastors and other ministries in the church.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON SINGLENES

Biblical Models and Concepts of Singleness

When God created Adam, and gave him Eve, it was his intention that the marriage relationship should become the springboard upon which human society is built as long as time should last. Their relationship was meant to be unique, intimate, complementary, and yet fulfilling in their roles. It is evident from Scripture that though each was an individual entity, God intended them to be one, united in action and purpose, and above all, submission, obedience, permanence, and exclusivity was enjoined as implied in Ephesians 5:22-28.

However, after the fall, the human condition and hardness of heart led to deviant behaviors, societal problems and inefficiencies, and marital breakdown. Separation and divorce from the original design became a painful option. Rather than deal with the baleful effects of marital breakdown, some opt or volunteer to remain single. However, in this research, the focus is on both voluntary and involuntary singleness.

Biblically, singleness is viewed as a gift; in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he wishes that all men and women were like him, a single adult committed to the service of Christ. He suggests that when people are single, they are able to serve God better because they do not have divided attention. Persons who do not have self-control of their bodily desires do not have to be single if they cannot exert self-discipline. The apostle

Paul commended single living, saying it is not sinful. In 1 Corinthians 7:2, 7-9, 27-28, Paul seems to elevate the single state to a pedestal of virtue (Hoffeditz, 2012).

In 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, Paul's recommendation that people remain single is given. Paul argues that singleness is good if people are in a position to serve God. For himself, Paul says he wants to be free from concern because the unmarried person is concerned with the things of the Lord and how he can please the Lord while the married person is concerned with worldly things and divided interests with the family. Paul says it is important to secure undistracted devotion towards God.

The advantages of being single as listed by Paul are many, including devoting oneself to God, avoiding the passions of the flesh, and having freedom to work for God without being tied by the desires of the flesh. The idea that Paul promotes is that weak people who cannot withstand sin and temptation of sexual desires are to be married. Those who choose to manage their bodily passions and dedicate themselves fully to the service of God are encouraged by Paul to do so. The gift of celibacy is viewed as a powerful tool for those who sacrifice their lives for the church.

Paige Benton (as cited in Hoffeditz, 2012) echoes the words of Paul by saying that she is not single as a result of being spiritually unstable to have a husband or as a result of being too spiritually mature to be in need of one; she says her being single is because God has been good to her and she believes it is the best for her. Not only did Paul dress singleness with propriety and spiritual standing of self-discipline, he also undressed the state of marriage by framing it as a position for weaklings who cannot stand the temptations of the flesh. If it had been Paul only, we could ignore the higher

moral standing of singleness, but Jesus did the same. When dealing with the theme of divorce, He addressed singleness as a higher calling.

Matthew 19:8-12 seems to classify eunuchs as those born to be single, those who are influenced by other people, and those who chose to become eunuchs because of their willingness to serve God (Hoffeditz, 2012). Jesus makes clear it would be better to remain single than to marry and then divorce. Thus, singleness becomes a better state than getting married and thereafter divorcing. Thus, like Paul, Jesus points to singleness as a way to avoid sin. Jesus' arguments in favor of singleness are also a warning against divorce and transgression of marital vows that ought to be eternal. From the point of view of Genesis 1: 28, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (NIV), it was God's original intention for marriage to be the tool for bonding and population of the earth. However, Jesus implied that Moses' permission of divorce was the result of moral declension, a negation from the natural and original blue print, not that it was so from the beginning, as indicated in Matthew 19:8. Hardness of heart bred issues of tyranny, intolerance, lust, malice, and such like situations. God did not intend to abrogate his Edenic institution of love and mutuality, which is aimed to be an eternal order of human society. Jesus meant to point out that every departure from the original plan was wrong and so, Moses gave such a rule for the sake of peace and to avoid the perpetuation of continued misery in the relationship.

Isaiah 54:5 is often quoted to single women by way of consolation that God is a husband. The meaning of husband is "a provider," the male head of a household—the

master of the house (Dictionary.com, n.d.b). God used the marriage relationship to illustrate his relationship with the church—He being the husband and the church his bride. The church without God—the husband—is single. God is therefore a husband for both male and female members of his church and each one is an object of his special care in every need. Acceptance with God, devotion through prayer and sacrifice of time for other-centered service could bring self-actualization and no time for solitariness because God is found to be all-sufficient, according to Psalm 73:25.

Many married people do not know how to talk about singlehood because the concepts or experiences of what it is like have not been their lot. Often a single person is falsely accused of being picky. A friend sarcastically told me that my children are being “choosy” about finding a spouse with a similar faith connection, and so they remain single while her two young adult children of the same age range are already married.

Singleness and Culture

In my experience with the Seventh-day Adventist church, singleness with special reference to the age group 25-40 years is recognized as a growing issue, but very serious steps are yet to be taken to teach/learn about singleness. In the Seventh-day Adventist church, single ladies are crying for the dearth of single men in the church. Single ladies are saying that the church needs to address the issue of singleness within the Seventh-day Adventist church, and not remain silent and/or pretend as if it does not exist, says a blogger on Adventist Online (2011). Whereas church leaders should educate their single population about dating values and pitfalls, pastors have to take the initiative of teaching their members that being single is not a sin. Single people are not second-rate, but are equal to and just as important as everyone else. Singleness was not originally the Edenic

plan, but in the course of time, singleness became one of those stations in life approved of by Scripture.

If one has been impressed to remain single; such a person is also called to celibacy. Those so called have the gift of self-control and need not marry. In this case, the ability to remain self-controlled and single is a gift from God. In some cultures, singleness in either gender is seen as an anomaly; however, there are biblical models whose singleness gave focus to a life of ministry. The expression of being “a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1) is used inclusively to imply devotedness to God and “other” service, for persons who have chosen to live without such bodily distractions and family demands which characterize married life. Though this appeal was not written with single persons in view, the apostle Paul’s recommendation that believers commit themselves unreservedly to God is none the less applicable in this condition. Living or dying unto God is much easier when solo and solely committed to denying oneself the lusts of the flesh and conformity to the lustful lifestyles of the world. He implies that giving honor to God in the body is but a most reasonable service in view of His numerous mercies, benevolence, and forgiveness of sins offered those who believe. According to Gaylord (2007), a single Christian person who is not distracted by family responsibilities might be more likely to portray the character of Christ better in terms of stewardship of time and focus than the married person. When a married person is providing for the needs of a spouse or children, performing these acts of kindness as acts of personal sacrifice and stewardship are still actions done to self as one entity with that family. The single person, however, has a better opportunity in terms of time and focus to do acts of sacrifice, benevolence and stewardship to others without any bloodlines attached.

The top level in the significance of human existence, according to Maslow's (1996) hierarchy of needs is self-actualization. The single person is more likely able to self-actualize, travel, or spend for ministry, and live spontaneously to fulfill a need without inhibitions. Furthermore, both male and female singles are regarded as one in the household of faith—servants, fellow citizens, saints, and children of God in his family, being spiritually minded because we are all one in Christ Jesus, entitled to the same privileges offered by the Gospel (Gal 3:28). Artificial distinction or sexual barriers have no place in the kingdom of God, making the hope of eternal life open and accessible to all. Paul does not mean that the social or sexual differences between Christian believers are nullified. According to Tolmie (2014),

Galatians 3:28 ... primarily addresses the issue of inheritance of Abraham's promise, and against this background, one should indeed accept that no worldly distinctions have any bearing on the inheritance of the promise. This, however, does not mean that the social differences between believers are nullified. (p. 108)

Though scholars focus the interpretation of this verse on social differences and inheritance in early Christendom and cultural practices at that time, I agree with Tolmie, quoting Punt (2010), who says, "it is as and through bodies as sexual and gendered entities, within communities and societal systems at large, that the biblical texts are constituted, and today, read and interpreted" (p. 111). Therefore, single persons can be included in the interpretations of this verse today to reflect such a status as befitting social equality with any other. The point is that no status in this temporal life is excluded from having an eternal inheritance with God. The apostle Paul sounds like a cultural change catalyst for liberation, making his congregation realize that in spite of ethnicity, social status, or gender, they were God's children.

According to Waehler (1996), men who are single (bachelors) maintain their singlehood with varying degrees of satisfaction and say they are comfortable that way. Staying unmarried affords more liberty and freedom as opposed to being confined to marriage rules. Bachelors cite that by being single, they are able to maintain independence and sanity. Although bachelors may cite that the single status is satisfactory, in the real sense emotional and spiritual challenges might exist. In order to best appreciate the challenges, it is important to offer active listening, and use a person-to-person rather than group pastoral care and counseling approach with a single person.

According to teachings by John Howard Yoder (as cited in Andronovien, 2014), singleness should be taught as the first state for each Christian because every adult person has been through it. Yoder further emphasized that there is no Christian teaching that requires that people get married as early as possible or have a preference for the married over the single. To further emphasize that singleness does not imply that the people are second-rate in society, the teachings need to bring in the notion that being single is a gift from God. Voluntary singleness, either as a way of serving God or out of choice should be appreciated in society, just like the choice to marry or not to be married. In Matthew 19:3-12, the Bible explains the challenges of living a married life, and brings out three ways in which people can be single: (a) some remain single for personal goals and ambitions, (b) some are single due to circumstances, and (c) some have chosen to be single because of wanting to serve the kingdom of heaven. This confirms that indeed singleness is appreciated in the Christian religion, but gives special heroism to those who dedicate themselves to being single for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Reasons for Singleness

Single adults are the largest church segment that is unreached, more so because little is known about lives of single persons and how they should be ministered to (Barna, 2003). Barna identifies different groups of single adults and pointed out their individual needs by shining a spotlight on their lifestyles and mindsets. He interviewed and did research on single adults to understand their needs, fears, and expectations. One of his findings was that “about 1 out of every 4 single adults base moral and ethical decisions on what feels right or feels most comfortable in a situation” (p. 54). Barna presents data on the spiritual practices and beliefs of singles. Clearly, putting single adults into one group does not help because their reasons for being single vary from one individual to the other, a few of which are categorized as follows:

Single by Chance

These persons have been hurt in interpersonal relationships and are afraid of repeating the circle of emotional pain. They therefore build walls of defensiveness around themselves and fail to relate closely. Fear of being hurt, fear of attachment and intimacy, fostering negativity, and being too critical of the opposite sex might be due to childhood relationships. Pre-conceived and long-cherished fantasies about an ideal date forbid letting someone else who does not measure up into the life. Therefore, pickiness and making rules for dating that do not work in real life continue until it becomes harder or too late to settle with a mate. Feelings of disappointment become a reason not to venture into a date.

Pursuits of Educational Enhancement

In some cases, educational pursuits have left a good number of men and women single for longer than they anticipated. For a lady, the biological time clock ticks out and a man considers her too old for procreation. Besides, some men get scared off by a lady's high educational attainment of which he himself might be deficient. On the other hand, the male might have the high education and a woman becomes interested because of his academic, financial, and social accomplishment but not necessarily for love.

Low Self-esteem

This condition is yet another reason some do not get married. An inferiority complex that "no one will be interested in me" because of physical appearance, educational debt, age, religious faith commitment, or belief pattern might pervade the thoughts. Listening to such voices produces behaviors that inadvertently push admirers away. These persons are still looking and hoping for a future lasting relationship. Their hearts are open to share with a man or woman who suits their fancy or crosses their path. However, until it happens, repeated disconnected relationships eventually lead to singleness by chance. One male contributor to the Adventist Online website (2011) described how males 20 to 40 years old are more attracted to non-Adventist girls because they are so "abundantly available." He admitted, however, that the males he was referring to were those who were not so "grounded in the message."

Single by Choice

People in this category over the years settle with platonic relationships and not any that would lead to permanence or settling down with anyone. Nanos (2012) reports in *Boston Magazine* on research on singleness by choice:

A 2006 survey of singles by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 55% of the never-married had zero interest in seeking a romantic partner. It turns out that many singles enjoy their independence. They're leading full lives. And they're far less lonely and isolated than some may believe. (para. 7)

Those single by choice are content to say 'I don't need a man or woman in my life to make me happy.' What these singles cherish most is for everyone to accept them for who they are.

Single by Circumstance

There are persons singled by divorce or widowhood. There are those whose special friend may have died even before the relationship was consummated in matrimony and who therefore, vowed to remain single for life. There are those who would love to pursue a relationship but a major setback left them unable to do so. The idea of raising a personal family in the future becomes defeated. A health hazard like a major surgical procedure from an accident may have resulted in physical disfigurement or emotional instability. For such, singlehood was not preferable to being married. It is just circumstantial. Moreover, it is not uncommon to hear single young adults comment that the greater fear is the burden of parenting children in today's world in view of the increased state of moral bankruptcy seen and heard about children and society. In the final analysis, the ideal goal is to celebrate with contentment the unique advantages of singleness just like one celebrates any other stage of life as a gift from God. Paul's admonition in Philippians 4:11 are for believers to be content whatever the circumstance in life.

Single for Service

There are people who are single because of opting to dedicate their lives to God and being able to serve God better in celibacy. Choosing to remain single might be a highly demanding calling in the sense that the single must determine to avoid social, immoral attractions. Singles can have joy in pursuit of other-centered Christian service. A single person can afford to give and do more by making the advancement of the cause of God a cherished service to pursue. Thus, hope in Jesus becomes more of the ideal than hope in marriage. According to Horst (2001), it is very likely that in Bible times, singles whose names were not stated lived and served God and society (John 21:25). It follows therefore, that putting more pressure on marriage than on Jesus might be idolatry and pursuit of vanity (Eccl 4:7, 8). While not discouraging people who choose to marry, the focus for the single should be on finding out the purpose of God and pursuing such calling. The scriptures expound a promise of an unseen benefit in the world to come for those who have left earthly pursuits such as marriage and family to following service to God and humanity (Matt 19:27-30). Both male and female will have an everlasting name and God will be husband for all (Gal 4:27; Isa 56:3-5).

Singleness and Church Worship

It is apparent that all young adult college students 18 years old and above, the 20-somethings, and single fit into the group classified as “single.” However, a responder on Daniel Wiginton’s blog (2010) says that the word *singles* does not attract college students and young adults; they really do not like that word because it is stigmatizing. In the United States, almost 40% of the minority population are single adults (Davidson, 1993). Barna (2003) found that single adults are searching for a church that will provide them

with friends and some good information about what the Bible says. According to Wiginton's responder, churches may have increased interest in reaching young adults in the congregation but have dramatically decreased their interest in single adults. Consequently, the trend is that single adult ministry is slowly dying nationwide. Thus, one can infer that the need for single adult ministry is overlooked in some churches, and some churches with such ministries lack a good understanding of what single adults need and how to minister to the single adult category of worshipers.

Christian singles should also be involved in more Christian related leisure time activities. It is often said that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. The best way to overcome this thinking is to be active in church outreach activities. If the single people in church would keep busy with church related programs, loneliness and life challenges would be given less attention. Following is a paraphrase of the opinion of one responder to a Boundless blog (2014) on the characteristics of a successful singles ministry:

The group should include singles of all ages and even young parents if they want to socialize with their single friends.

Older people in the church should mentor singles as they prepare for marriage or ministry.

Church ministries such as working at a local shelter, painting a widow's house, collecting Samaritan's Purse Shoe Box Donations, planning a church event, etc. should be assigned to the singles group and announced along with other events.

Church leadership should examine and let go of negative stereotypes about singleness, marriage, and our Christian identity, and welcome college students and twenty-something professionals along with the other singles groups.

Church leadership should not assume that because people are single they have more free time and can or even want to therefore take on the tasks unwanted by those who are married and have children.

Singles should not be called on only when specific mixing of the genders is involved.

Singles ministries should foster a sense of belonging and understanding, exerting no pressure to marry. (paras. 16-19)

Singles' ministry should aim to teach and demonstrate the practicality of a Christian's life, which is to be like a letter sent by Christ to the world. From a heart that is renewed by divine grace through Bible study, such a living "letter" would demonstrate the power of the gospel to transform lives and thereby witness for God.

Exploring Hope and Waiting

There are many people who are single, both men and women, because they have not yet identified the right person with whom they can settle and start a family. The estimation is that about 50.2% or 124.6 million adults in the United States are single (Li, 2014). In 1950, that number was estimated at about 22%. Singles have taken over the adult population despite the rise of online dating (Raphael, 2014). Though the number is high and still rising, it is often assumed that in the mind of the single person, the hope that one day the right person will come up is a sustaining coping mechanism. At the same time, there are people who are single because of opting to dedicate their lives to God and being able to serve God better in celibacy.

Singles deserve the hope and strength to achieve their goals in Christian service. It is important for church and society to appreciate that God loves all regardless of gender, station, or status in life. In the biblical stories, various people waited upon God for several years and finally God revealed himself to such persons in abundant ways. God called upon many people to wait on him, among whom were Sarah, Abraham, Joseph, Jacob, and Hannah. Daniel, Mordecai, and Esther waited on God to liberate them from physical tyranny and slavery. Waiting on the Lord was an integral period of their service to God. Isaiah 40:31 says that those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength

and run without being weary, mount up with wings, just like eagles, and walk and not faint. This is further highlighted in Lamentations 3:25, which says that God is good to those who put their hope in Him and wait upon Him. Sarah did not have a child until she got into old age; God gave Sarah and Abraham a child even though both were long past the child-bearing age. Although all hope was lost of Sarah ever having a child, God rekindled this hope by the gift of a son—Isaac. This shows that people should not give up on God, but should continue believing by doing what is right. As a result of his obedience to God, Abraham was made the father of all nations, with so many descendants. This was a reward for serving God obediently and believing in Him.

The single person might conquer negative feelings through perseverance, personal responsibility, and accountability to God. Single people in church could therefore gather courage from the lives of biblical and contemporary single achievers to understand the importance of waiting upon God. Courage here is not necessarily for marital union but for insightful life, personal fulfillment, and for community contribution. Waiting includes time during which the single person should request God to reveal and sharpen areas of giftedness.

Waiting is never easy because man cannot read the mind of God. From personal experience, human nature is bound to worry and fret since waiting breeds uncertainties. It requires much patience to wait and some persons are better at managing their emotions during crucial waiting times than others. Sometimes God surprises people with a different expectation. I personally have been single and at the same time jobless for the past six years, waiting on God not for marriage but for financial deliverance and social advancement. In my experience, anxiety often takes the upper hand while waiting for the

unknown; waiting tends to diminish faith and dampen hope. Waiting patiently should be synonymous with having an optimistic outlook in life. It is an uneasy state that requires the exercise of faith and hope in the unseen, being comfortable with uncertainty, an unknown future, or outcomes. God expects Christian believers to be confident in Him and therefore be at peace while waiting. Being at peace in singleness can only come by total submission to being comfortable with one's single station in life. Finding busyness and discovering beingness—the true essence of living—is important.

In my understanding, getting involved in things that bring happiness to self and others, and finding social and spiritual ties that discourage boredom and loneliness would make singleness a productive, joyful, and regrettable solitude. The counsel of Eliphaz to Job comes to mind: “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee” (Job 22:21, KJV). In the light of singleness being a gift, those who are given to this status must already have been gifted with contentment and a sense of fulfillment and peacefulness with singleness. The single person may not be estranged from God as Eliphaz supposed Job was, but might still wrestle with occasional moments of questioning until a time of total surrender to the will of God. Satisfaction comes in a life of service and willingness to adventure in new areas of learning while developing a deepening relationship with God and humanity.

White (1892) wrote of unselfish devotion to Christian duties in this way:

The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christ like loveliness to the character, and brings peace and happiness to its possessor. The aspirations are elevated. There is no room for sloth or selfishness. Those who thus exercise the Christian graces will grow and will become strong to work for God. They will have clear spiritual perceptions, a steady, growing faith, and an increased power in prayer. The Spirit of God, moving upon their spirit, calls forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch. Those who thus devote themselves to unselfish effort for the good of others are most surely working out their own salvation. (p. 80)

Undoubtedly, there must come times of weariness, anxiety, comparisons, or doubt about the chosen path. As I write, I can testify to these feelings. However, I keep myself occupied in hospital ministry and coaching people about the benefits of holistic healing. When the single person is pre-occupied with developing the intellect for service, God directs and transforms the mind with a revelation of Him, giving the individual power to be strong and heavenly minded. Psalm 103:13 says that just like a father is compassionate to his children, so does the Lord show compassion to the people who serve and fear Him. God is always in charge and He has full knowledge of what He is doing in the life of the single Christian. Single people in church should trust God because he does not lose control of their devotion. God has a plan for each person because He has wisdom and love for every person. His plan is always individualized for those who believe in Him.

Conclusion

Single Christians may take the example of Paul, whose life was all messed up, but he never gave up. Paul had no spouse to keep him company, no children of his own, no home, no steady income; he was beaten, imprisoned, and shipwrecked but he overcame all the circumstances. Although Paul experienced distress, loneliness, and oppression, he never despaired but always had hope that in all the challenges, he had a secure relationship with Christ and his heavenly inheritance was certain. Paul's contentment in times of problems was because of his great confidence in Christ's power. Jesus is the vine while Christians are the branches; He is the Head while Christians are his body. The hope for single Christians to come out joyous in the challenging circumstances surrounding singleness is to find their worth and hope by identifying with Jesus and being comfortable with that station (Horger, 2009).

Christian couples do face challenges with their marriages, including struggles with children, spouses, homes, jobs, family relationships, and other issues. The struggle with loneliness still exists within marriages and relationships because in some cases the partners may be working away from home or too committed at work that little attention is given to family living. Marriages usually have challenges to the extent of partners not communicating with each other, thus rendering themselves lonely. While other singles may covet the lives of their married friends, it should be borne in mind that their married friends may not always expose their personal challenges in marriage. The single person who is contented in singleness does not have to worry about such burdens. A Christian single might therefore feel more strengthened in being gifted with a personal resolve to a high calling. God must be considered as the only hope for lasting satisfaction.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychology and Sociology of Singleness

Single people have the potential to get adequate rest with no disturbance, unlike married people who face spousal issues, and at times disturbances from children. Getting good rest is important for enhanced memory. Smith (2013) cites Bette Davis in the movie *Now Voyager* (1942), observing that singles tend to keep physically fit, “work out more in gyms and exercise groups to stay slim and attractive.” Smith further states, “married women tend to gain weight, and unhappily married women tend to gain proportionally more.” With regards to rest and memory, Smith list other advantages of being single as “being better rested, and even smarter. The article further states, “Researchers have found that sleeping two to a bed isn’t as restful as sleeping alone, so singles get more sleep, which they say results in enhanced memory and cognitive skills.”

Similarly, singles’ chances of being depressed are lower because the issue of anticipating for a husband is not there to worry about. Having good friends keeps people happy; this is the case for single persons. Being single, they have enough time to socialize with friends, which makes them happier, unlike their married counterparts who have to spend time with their spouses and children, limiting their interactions with other people. Single people tend to better understand themselves because of the time spent on meeting their individual needs. Singles enjoy more flexibility in scheduling their time and goals. They are free to take risks that might not have been possible if they had a family to

nurture. Piper (1991) quotes Taylor, a single missionary in Kenya, who writes, “Being single has given me freedom to move around the world without having to pack up a household first” (p. 8).

On the other hand, single people face a number of challenges resulting from the loneliness of living without a partner. Every individual, faces emotional challenges, and at such times the lonely one needs a shoulder to lean on. The single person is more likely to have no one with whom to share issues, and might have feelings of abandonment. This may lead a weak-minded single to make bad decisions such as committing suicide in the absence of someone to help in coping with emotional challenges. Single people lack intimacy, which is an important aspect of every person’s life. Their situation dictates doing things individually without any support, such as cleaning, cooking, paying bills, shopping, and taking care of children.

When one is a single parent, the responsibility of taking care of the children alone can be tasking and costly. Maintaining discipline in the children, especially for single mothers, is a major challenge. In addition, it can be quite costly to live alone, in that the rental bills have to be paid without the financial assistance of a partner.

Single people have reduced benefits, such as not getting the benefits of insurance and housing. In some societies, their income tax is higher (Arnold & Campbell, 2013). Living alone increases risks, such as the fear of being attacked at home. Having company is therefore important inasmuch as many people prefer to remain single. However, they enjoy and protect their freedom or comfort zone nested in unspoken loneliness. They resent intrusion into their personal lives for fear of rejection. For those women who still

want to marry, by the time they wake up to the realities of openness to approaches from males, time has ticked away.

Singleness Among Women

The lives of women, and their relationships and experiences have evolved over time, with more and more women being empowered to lead single lives and be independent should situations dictate so. In the past, women were required to be in relationships, regardless of how they were being treated. This has however changed, as women have acquired more power through education, access to job opportunities, travel, and independence. The fact that women can work and own businesses has been a major game changer for them. This has resulted in more independence to do whatever things they wish to do. More than ever before, women are single by choice. It does not seem necessary any more for women to have husbands, as it has been in the past. Values and paradigms regarding marriage, singleness, cohabitation, divorce, and even parenting are shifting. Perspectives on commitment and loyalty have changed (Barna, 2003). Women view a number of advantages of being single compared to being married. When women are single, keeping physically fit by spending a lot of time at the gyms and watching what is eaten are usually considered in order to stay slim and attractive. Research indicates that most women gain weight after marriage, regardless of whether there are children or not including those who may not even be happy in the marriage (Ani, 2010). However, according to MacMillan (2014), “Despite plenty of sensational headlines— ‘Get married and get fat!’ ‘Stay single and die young!’—it's hard to say definitively whether being a spouse or a singleton (or something in between, as many Americans are today) is

healthier overall.” MacMillan goes on to enumerate seven ways (some positive and some negative) that being single affects one’s health.

Either way, there are pros and cons for any state in life either by chance, choice or otherwise. It should be noted, however, that emotional situations do affect physical wellbeing. In their singleness, women tend to achieve greater things because of the determination to work harder to attain their goals. With more time and fewer responsibilities as a result of having no spouse and family to care for, single women can be more productive in their careers. Managing money is more comfortable for the single woman because she does not have to ask anyone how she can use her money and there are no worries about a possibly irresponsible spouse misusing her money or getting into debt. Decision making with regard to money and investment also becomes easier for the single women to invest without any inhibiting consultations. The unattached can avoid the trap of hoping that their partner will handle certain responsibilities.

In a culture like mine in Nigeria, such financial independence is only practicable when the woman is not bogged with a lot of responsibilities from the marital family. A single woman does less housework and does it at her convenience, and has potential to achieve greater things with good planning. Traditionally, a wife is not only married to her husband, but is also “married” to the entire family; hence she is called “our wife.” In this sense, she shares the responsibilities of the family financially, socially, spiritually, and otherwise.

Most single women (those who still want a relationship) find singleness to be a comfort zone of temporary freedom. This makes it hard for them to leave their comfort zone to get into relationships. Many people tend to be comfortable with that which is

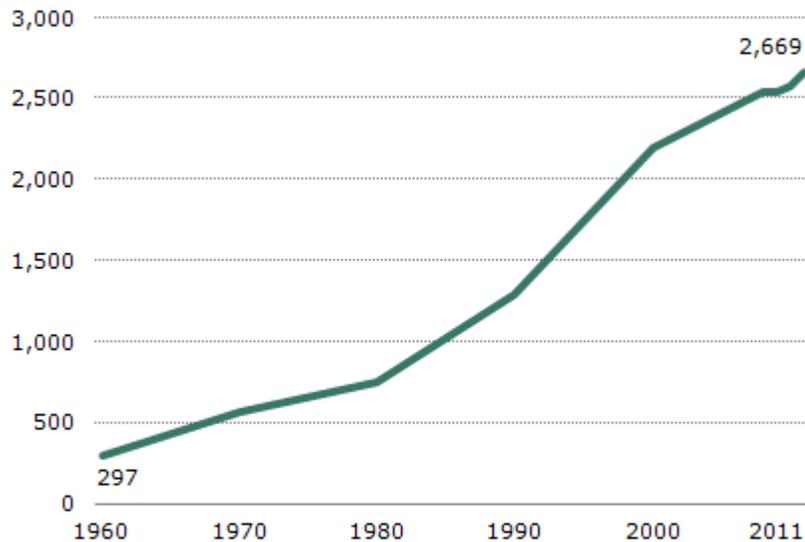
familiar to them, and although a single person may not be comfortable being single, the person tends to have a feeling of satisfaction in being single because that is what she is familiar with. This prevents many single women from taking any emotional risks by getting close to a man for love. This is likely to result in ruined relationships because such people fail to commit themselves fully to any relationships. This can happen with women or men.

Singleness Among Men

Just like single women, single men face challenges in their singleness. Men also get affected when they do not have company. The lack of emotional and moral support also affects them; this leaves them with feelings of abandonment and loneliness. The percentage of households headed by single fathers in the United States has been on the increase, with 8% of households with children being headed by single fathers, a rise from 1% in 1960 (see *Figure 1*). As a result of this increase, men are making up an increasing share of households led by single parents. The main difference between single mothers and single fathers is that single fathers have a higher likelihood of cohabiting with a partner—41%, unlike 16% for women. Single fathers also have higher incomes on average compared to single mothers, who are more likely to be living below the poverty line.

Rising Number of Single Father Households, 1960-2011

In thousands



Notes: Based on household heads ages 15 and older who have children younger than 18 in the household. Fathers who are married but their spouse is absent and those who are cohabiting with a non-marital partner are classified as single fathers.

Source: Pew Research analysis of Decennial Census and American Community Survey (IPUMS)

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Figure 1. Men becoming single parents.

Single fathers face more challenges in raising children on their own, and in many cases, fathers may opt for cohabitation with other partners in order to raise the children (Gretchen, 2013). Single fathers need the support of family to raise their children. Quite often, when a man is a single father without a partner, the family is likely to step in to take care of the children. This is because of the assumption that men may not be able to fully take care of children as women can. Society also plays a key role in helping such men to raise their children. Religion comes in handy in single father situations. In a Pew Report, Brown (2013) reports that there are resources available to single moms by virtue

of gender, but not to single dads. Single dads need “female mentors for their daughters and sons; community support groups for single dads; access to and a willingness to use government and social-service programs that help low-income single parents; online resources.” The church could be an avenue to meet these needs. A few churches may offer guidance to single fathers on how to take care of their children. In these cases, more especially when there are financial issues, the church can step in and help. The same Pew Report also noted that “single dads are more likely than married dads to live in poverty—1 in 4 single dads lives at or below the poverty line compared to less than 1 in 10 married dads.”

Single men without children in many cases are single by choice or due to their commitment to other activities such as education. Most of them prefer to be single when they have many resources which are not easy to part with. Single men tend to be content with their single status, and do not seem to be facing issues getting partners. According to an article by Jordon (n.d.), single men love to enjoy their freedom and individuality. Some may have cultural pressure from family of origin and friends whereas all they want is space and quiet. Some remain single for fear of taking on the responsibility that comes with marriage. Yet another class just want to value their feminine friendship circle, enjoy their financial security, avoid the problem of love and develop the ability to take care of themselves.

Singleness and Social Justice

Because not a few of marriages face numerous challenges (such as battery, abuse, lack of respect, and infidelity) marriage is not viewed as being completely noble. For marriage to be noble, its foundation has to be built on Christian values with the

redemptive power of Christ (Hsu, 2007). The Roman Catholic church appreciates singleness as a way of being able to serve God better. However, growing up in Nigeria, I was taught the idea that young people are expected by God and society to get married. I remember an occasion in my early twenties, my father sat me at the dinner table after Sabbath worship and told me, “Ekele, you are getting older and are not married; what shall we do with you?” Many times, I heard pastors read from various books by Ellen G. White and share the idea that we girls needed to be married. This same experience has continued with me, even at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church, although I am now in my 50s!

In traditional Seventh-day Adventist churches in Nigeria or Ghana, elders encourage families to match-make youths within the church and/or encourage them to get to know each other and form relationships. Such arrangements are aimed at ensuring that young people do not remain single. Walter, who is 24 years old and a member of a Christian church, says his pastor is always making an effort to match him with a female member of the church, irrespective of her age or interests (Hsu, 2007). The underlying message in such churches is that singles are incomplete if they do not have a spouse. Such classifications in churches can be irritating as it is a type of stigmatization.

Churches that emphasize children and family tend to make singles feel out of place. However, some religious groups seem to hold single persons in high esteem—especially single women who have acquired some high academic qualifications. Aune, as cited by Andronovien (2014), explores the experience of single people among evangelicals. She discusses the framework of the communities that have shaped the prevalent attitudes toward singleness.

Aune takes note of the ever-increasing number of single women in church and argues that it is important for the churches to address the issues faced by single women. Interviews done by the author on single people in church indicate that singles are deeply disappointed with the church due to the churches' lack of response to their needs.

A single female church member, Andronovien (2014) accounts, complained of being called around by one or two church friends to babysit for their children because of the assumption that the single person has no serious responsibilities. "My biggest gripe," this member complained, "was being asked to babysit by people who seemed to expect that I had a duty to serve in this way." Any time she was invited to the home, there was always a meal with the children. It was an uncomfortable situation for the member as it was obvious that her adulthood was not being respected, even though she was of the same age as her married friends. These families mostly associated her with children because she was not married. This person in many cases felt ignored by church members. Denial of personal greetings and exchange of pleasantries became obvious, but it was not uncommon to find married persons requesting financial assistance from their single colleagues because the single person is viewed as not having much responsibility (p. 42).

Singleness Among African Americans

Black Americans are more likely to be single parents compared to Whites. A number of theorists are of the argument that slavery in one way or the other resulted in the instability and reorganization of Black families (Ruggles, 2010). Singleness can be traced to the effects of slavery, which resulted in the deterioration of the family life of Blacks. A number of theorists have argued that the Black person's disadvantaged position in the White society is the cause of single-parent families. The extended family is the

means through which Black people cope with both single parenthood and poverty. Black individuals who are not single parents and can afford baby-sitting fees, can live without the aid of an aunt, cousin, or niece. For the poor single parent who cannot afford paid baby-sitting, the role of the extended family assures the health and well-being of the children. Their wide range of duties includes financial assistance, having a guaranteed place to live, provision of meals, and co-parenting.

Between 1880 and 1960, the number of single parent households among Black families was stable, but in 1960 it increased sharply. The number of extended households was also stable until 1960, when it increased in an apparent effort to cater to the increasing cases of single parenthood. Before 1940, parentless children or single parents could account for a higher percentage of Black extended households. At that time, there were more extended families among Whites than there were among Blacks. After 1940, Black households had a higher probability of being extended, irrespective of whether they contained parentless children or single parents (Ruggles, 2010).

According to Ruggles (2010), most African-American children are born and raised in single-parent homes. When compared to White women, there is a higher probability of Black women becoming teenage mothers, remaining as single parents, and experiencing instability in marriage. African Americans are therefore more likely than Whites to live in families headed by females. This has resulted in the term Black matriarchy being coined due to the presence of so many Black homes headed by women. Democrat Senator Daniel Moynihan (1965) addressed the issue of Black families lacking a nuclear family set up in which there is a father and mother present. He indicated that this would hinder the socioeconomic progress of the Black community.

On the other hand, Thomas, Krampe, and Newton (2007) report, “In the African-American culture, the father representative has historically acted as a role model for two out of every three African-American children, yet there are still many who never have this opportunity” (p. 536). Thomas et al. cite a 2002 survey that concluded that although the father’s presence in the home increases the life success of the children, a lack of that presence impacts them negatively in many areas such as educational performance and teen pregnancy.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the period between 1880 and 1960 most African-American family structures were comprised of two parents and their children, but after 1960, family structures declined sharply and single-parent families increased. In the city of New York in 1925, 85% of the Black households had both parents but by the 1960s when Moynihan warned of the Black family being destroyed, the percentage had fallen to 25%. By 1991, 68% of the Black children born to African Americans were born out of marriage. A 2011 report indicated that 72% of the Black children were born to unmarried mothers. African-American families are in many cases regarded as fatherless, poor, being born outside of wedlock, and dependent on government assistance (Ruggles, 2010).

Research indicates that in the African-American culture, while both parents provide nurture and discipline, mothers are the primary socializers of children. Men are seen as invisible or absent players in the daily family dramas (McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997). The lack of the father figure has resulted in a number of negative effects on children, from teen pregnancy to educational performance. A high percentage of African-American fathers hardly visit their children, compared to White fathers. Consequently,

many African-American teenagers do not know how they should approach their father when they are in his presence. Father and child are often perfect strangers for a long time.

The African-American lifestyle is more or less a repeating cycle in which children are born to single parent families in which the father figure is absent. The single mother is tasked with many responsibilities of taking care of the children, doing household chores while at the same time working a regular job to make ends meet. This leaves her little or no time at all to take care of the children and give them enough guidance. The father, on the other hand, is never present, and this leaves the children to raise each other as none of the parents have time for them. In most cases, the African-American children associate with each other and likely get involved in illegal activities such as the use of drugs, alcoholism, prostitution, and theft. In such scenarios, the African-American community produces children who are irresponsible, with the boys being involved in drugs and alcoholism, and in order to get money for drugs, stealing and acts of violence often result. Thus, the seeds of sin are sown early in life. It is for this reason that most Black teenagers end up in prison. When the father is incarcerated early in the life of the child it affects emotional and social development.

According to research conducted by Thomas et al. (2007), “28% of African-American children do not live with any father representative (p. 536). Incarceration is the root cause of the negative family trend. It worsens the situation, “perpetuates poverty, single parenthood, and the separation of family units” (Hattery & Smith, 2007). The 2003 census data indicates that there are 91 Black males for every 100 females (Dixon, 2009).

On the other hand, the young girls end up using drugs due to lack of guidance and counseling. In their drugged state, African-American youth are not able to make rational

decisions on whom to have relationships with. This results in a repeating cycle in which unguided teenage girls in the African-American community have sexual relations with young irresponsible teenagers in their drunken states. The teenage boys cannot take care of the children and as a result, single mothers are created over and over.

Black children who come from households with both parents have high academic advantages compared to Black children from homes with single parents (McLanahan & Sandefur, 2009). The National Household Education's Surveys on the involvement of family and parent found that on average, Black students with both parents had a grade-point of 3.1, those from homes with only mothers had 3.0, those with only fathers had 2.9 and those with neither of the parents had a 2.7 grade score (Toldson, 2013). This clearly indicates the role that parents play in the educational performance of their children, and the reason children from African-American households are affected in many ways by the lack of parental support. Toldson also reports that White families have more children in single-parent homes than Black families.

A study on the health behaviors of school-age children found that among the Black males who were in middle and high school with a father figure, 62% of them performed very well in school while only 55% of those with no fathers performed well. Among those who had no mother or father in their homes, less than half of them had good or very good grades in their academics (Toldson, 2013). Thus, the research indicates that singleness among African-American parents moderately affects school performance.

Singleness Among Caucasians

Caucasians are among the races with the highest percentage of never married adults (51%). More adults are opting to raise their children out of marriage in order to avoid marriage commitments. Recent studies by Pew Research analysis indicate that about 24% of young people who have never been married are living with a partner (Wang & Parker, 2014). Among Caucasians, hard economic times, shifting public attitudes, and the change in demographic patterns are all contributing to the increasing number of never-married adults. The attitudes of Caucasians about the marriage institution indicate that marriage is losing meaning. What is notable among Caucasians is that adults with college education have experienced a sharp decline in marriage numbers compared to those who are less educated.

In terms of marriage, Caucasians tend to get married but have a high rate of divorce. Caucasians embrace singleness because so many of them are single through divorce, death of a spouse, or choice. According to VanLang (2013), using data from the *New York Times* with respect to women, only Blacks (50%) surpass Caucasians (40%) in divorce rate. Caucasians also have a higher probability of staying single out of choice. Most of the people in America who are single out of choice are Caucasians. For Caucasians, being single is normal, and they have absolutely no issue with singleness. Moreover, most Caucasians are college educated with degrees. The women are empowered and exposed, with the independence to do things their own way without being controlled or tied down by family commitments.

Caucasians are very open-minded to singleness and getting divorced is not a big deal if the marriage is not yielding what is expected. In the past, not so many Caucasian women had higher education. However, the number of Caucasian women going to

college has grown and by the 1990s, women started to outpace men in their rates of completing college education. With more women getting into education, the desire to become professionals increased, getting more Caucasian women out of their previous roles as housewives. Wang and Parker (2014) observe that Caucasian women today are more concerned with how to develop their careers by paying more attention to their jobs and education. This is taking more of their time. The time that would previously be spent on family is now being spent on career development and advancement of skills.

Singleness Among Asians

Asians believe in marriage as an institution that should be respected, and that once people have decided to get married, there should be no divorce (Yang, 2012). For this reason, most marriages between Asians last longer compared to those of other races. The culture of Asians dictates that Asians marry within their own nationality; this limits their marriages from being incorporated into the Western culture, which allows for divorce and singleness. In many cases, Asian marriages are arranged by families, whereby parents identify a potential partner for their children and match them up for marriage. This ensures that the Asian cultural beliefs are maintained, and that the marriages are also maintained.

Although the rates of intermarriage in America are on the increase, Asians are resisting the trend and sticking to partners from their own community. The various religions of Asia advocate that people should get married and not stay single. When Asians are old enough for marriage and are single, their families and friends come in to help them get marriage partners. This ensures that each person has someone to marry. Most Asians keep to themselves; their circles are only limited to fellow Asians. This

prevents them from interacting with people from other races, ensuring that their culture is well protected and followed. The manner in which Asians are raised is such that young people are strictly given rules for adherence by not interacting with people from other races. At the same time, the Western culture is criticized, which makes them reject Westerners and their ideas. This modifies the thinking of Asians from childhood and that makes Asian youth well prepared to marry from the Asian community. With their interaction only limited to Asians, the only option from which to choose when it comes to marriage is to get an Asian partner.

Singleness Among Africans

The African culture has a lot of respect for marriage. African weddings and marriages are viewed as social and spiritual affairs that involve the combination of two people, two families and even communities. In some societies, especially in the west, marriage and maternity do not always go together. In the west, the woman is free to choose marriage without maternity or maternity without marriage. She could choose none or both in a variety of ways. In contrast, womanhood in the African tradition and culture is meaningless without both (Oguejiofor & Onah, 2005). In the African culture, a man who does not have a wife or a woman who does not have a husband is viewed as being incomplete.

Marriage in Africa is therefore viewed as sacred because through it, relationships are solidified and this is crucial in enriching nations and communities by bringing forth new hope and new life (Agorsah, 2012). The most celebrated and cherished rite of passage since the civilization of Africa is marriage. In Africa, marriage is a sacred union. This is because it solidifies relationship that enriches communities and nations by

bringing forth new life and new hope. Marriage is that cultural process which ushers in new life. It is considered rude to talk about sex casually or for fun (Oderinde, 2013). Marriage is known to be the best way in which to raise fully socially functional children. Therefore, most people marry to have children or with the hope of maintaining the family line. It is seen with biblical eyes as a holy and the only legitimate way to bring children into this world. Having children guarantees social and generational continuity. The extended family is highly regarded in the African contexts, whereby even if a woman does not have children of her own, raising children in a communal setup is acceptable. Children are highly valued in the African culture and once people are married, children are expected to follow.

The African culture does not support divorce under any circumstances, and in many cases of marital issues, couples are asked to sort out their differences rather than parting ways. When couples have marital issues, elders from the community or family come in to help sort their personal differences. This ensures that couples do not just head for divorce when there are other solutions that could help solve the problem. The African society is patriarchal, with men being the heads of the family and therefore with the right to make decisions concerning their families. The woman is expected to be submissive to her husband and do whatever she is asked to do. This therefore limits women from being in a position to oppose the decisions made by their men. With more women being limited and controlled by their husbands, the rates of divorce are reduced because women lack or are denied a say concerning their relationships with their husbands.

Many African communities practice polygamy. The war between African polygamous marriages and Christianity is the indication that polygamy is the component

of African culture. Polygamy is one of the forms of marriage in traditional African culture, so no one can accept the institution of marriage in African culture without accepting its existence (Oliello, 2005). As a result, men can have as many women as possible. By implication, if a man gets dissatisfied with his wife, rather than asking for a divorce, he can marry another woman and have two wives. The polygamy situation in Africa tends to ensure that every single woman has a chance of getting married. The number of single men in Africa is minimal because the family and society at large works towards ensuring that the men get women to marry by going to the extent of arranging marriages for them if they are not in a situation to get partners on their own. The practice of arranged marriages is still common among many African communities and in many ways, contributes to the low rates of singleness in the African society. Young people are raised knowing that divorce and singleness are not allowed, which ensures that their mentality is structured to embrace marriage (Agorsah, 2012).

The African society is resistant to children born out of wedlock. This makes women stay in their marriages because if they leave their matrimonial home, other women step in and proper care of the children, if any, cannot be guaranteed. Similarly, the African family is large; in many cases, couples have many children because childbirth is encouraged and seen as a blessing in marriage. This leaves couples having many children and reduces chances of divorce because of the fear that raising many children with a different spouse could be challenging. In the African tradition, a marriage's indissolubility could be based on its fruitfulness. A child's birth results in a marriage's consummation because then, the marriage cannot be easily dissolved. In some African cultures like the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, having a child out of wedlock, especially

if the father is not identified, is regarded as a social disgrace to the family. In fact, such a child is looked upon as a “bastard;” but if the father is known and no bride price (dowry) was paid, the child cannot be claimed by the father. The pain is worse for a male child because of his non-entitlement to the family name and inheritance. However, these traditions are gradually changing due to urbanization, education, travel, and Christianity.

When an African woman is barren, the woman is considered to be a failure not only to her husband, but also to the family and society at large, even when there may be some medical challenges on the part of the husband! In this situation, the man may choose to send the woman back to his in-laws and marry another woman. Such a woman may choose to remain in the marriage knowing full well that the man might marry again any time for the sake of having children. The woman can remain with the husband but the husband has the option of remarrying. In some cases though, a woman may not like to have a co-wife. In other cases, if the woman separates from the husband, remarriage is not usually an option but an arrangement by which a younger woman is brought into the matrimonial home as “wife” to the childless woman. This young woman is now expected to bear children on behalf of the barren senior wife. It is important to note that there is no intimacy between the women as a couple. The relationship is acceptable and interpreted as that of husband and wife. The barren woman is seen to be the husband in the relationship and this way, the childless woman can get respect and be recognized in the society. In situations whereby the husband is impotent, the wife may opt to stay in the marriage.

In order to obtain children, the woman has the option of obtaining a different woman of child-bearing age as a “wife” to the husband. It does not matter the source of

pregnancy but the children are acceptable and simply become children of the man and woman, and their mother stays with the family as a helper. Such a union is recognized by the community. The younger woman will only have intimacy with the man of the home with the permission of the older woman who functions as “husband.” This way, the barren woman who had been seen by the society as a barren person is given a chance of having a family.

Property plays a key role in the African culture and marriage. Most women in Africa, with the exception of a few who are educated and exposed, do not work. Many women stay home taking care of their homes while their husbands do paid work to provide for the family. Their possession of any property is based on marriage. This makes it hard for women to separate from the marriage because that would mean going without any livelihood. Lack of employment or in some cases lack of formal education means being totally dependent on a husband; therefore, separation becomes difficult or even impossible. There are families that do not entertain separation or divorce, and in such situations a woman who leaves the husband’s home without personal financial buoyancy would be forced to go back for lack of personal finance (James, 2005).

The main reason why men would be single in the African community is as a result of impotence. Men who cannot sire children are stigmatized in the African community and viewed as outcasts by many. As a result, such men do not have a voice in the society and cannot take part in making major decisions. In most situations, the man’s family could assist by arranging for adoption. Despite this arrangement, such men still remain as social outcasts because of the known inability to have children of their own. In fact, in

some cases such men would get mocked by their peers. Most impotent men therefore end up keeping to themselves.

Single men in the African society whose singleness is out of choice are rare to find; however, such do exist. The general assumption in the African setting is that every man should marry and have children. If a man fails to do so, the assumption is that such a man is impotent or has some issues related to intimacy and is viewed as a weakling or an outcast. Even when the singleness is out of choice, family members and friends make an effort towards talking to them about marriage and even getting them partners. Such is aimed at encouraging the men to get into relationships. For most parents, when their son fails to marry and have a family, disappointment is openly expressed to such a son until he marries. Marriage is often a seal of manhood. Singleness out of choice among men is therefore not common in the African society, and it is not acceptable.

The single father situation in the African culture is handled differently from other cultures. Causes for singleness can be the death of a spouse or separation with the children's mother. When single fathers are left with children, most of them end up remarrying; the main reason is to have someone who can take care of the children and cook for the man. Men in the African culture are not expected to take part in some responsibilities, such as household chores. To raise children is strictly seen as a woman's role. Co-parenting is not very well accepted. If a man is widowed, especially when the children are very young, the immediate option is remarriage. The man is expected to remarry someone who can take care of him and the young children. Although there are men who can decide to raise their children on their own without remarrying, this

percentage is very small. Actually, the society usually comes in and suggests women whom the man could choose to marry in order to help in the household chores.

In Nigeria, for instance, marriage is viewed as the cornerstone of the society. It is believed that for children to grow up physically, mentally, socially, and educationally balanced, family support should be given by both parents.

Although divorce is known to shatter the harmony and peace of the family, about 30% of the couples who are married in Nigeria end up divorcing. Although couples are being encouraged to solve their problems rather than opting for divorce, the rate of divorce is growing each day. The rate of divorce in Nigeria has been on the rise from the start of the 20th century, and peaked in the 1980s. Experts in Nigeria attribute this increase to the fact that divorce laws are available. The laws have helped to weaken the marriage strength, making it hard for couples to work out their marital issues (Edinyang, Ubi, & Yaro, 2013).

With an increase in the rates of divorce, the cases of singleness are increasing each day. In some countries in Africa, such as Nigeria, singleness is gaining some acceptance in the society because of the high divorce rates. Although most African societies do not advocate for singleness, as people get more exposed, appreciating the need for people to lead their lives is gaining ground. It will take time, though, for singleness to be totally accepted in the African society.

Singleness Among Latinos

The growth of the Latino population in the United States has resulted in various studies being carried out on the family structure of Latinos. Latinos place a very high value on religion and family. Latinos spend some time during the week to attend to

religious activities and services. Their livelihoods are based on their religious teachings and beliefs. Most Latinos agree that the family is the basic building block of a healthy community and that children are better off if both parents are with them (Barna, 2012).

Latinos do not view singleness positively and do not fully advocate for it. However, it is understood that some situations call for people to be single if relationship building cannot be sustained. Like Asians, most Latinos marry among their own nationality, ensuring to keep their cultural ties intact. This has helped to sustain the marriage structure of their communities. Latinos believe strongly in the church and the role it plays in influencing the youth to relate appropriately and therefore form healthy relationships that would help them get into the institution of marriage. Latinos strongly believe in the importance of the family unit and work towards maintaining families. Their religious affiliations help in maintaining healthy family relationships.

Conclusion

The marriage institution is of high importance to people from various communities. However, in the recent past, there has been a rise in singleness in society. There are various reasons for these shifts. Some of the reasons include the rise in educational level among women. Working women have little time to raise families, and while for some it is by choice, for others it is due to the increase in divorce. Whatever the reasons may be, it should be noted that divorce has contributed to the rise in singleness in society. Some societies do not advocate for people to be single and in one way or the other some people have managed to keep their cultural teachings on marriage intact.

Religious institutions play a key role in dealing with the issue of singleness and how it can be handled. Some churches group their members based on their marital status

and counsel them on some acceptable life-style related practices which could enhance choice of life-partners. Although the reason for this is to minister to the single people in church, most of the single people find this strategy unacceptable.

Another issue the churches are facing is the fact that, although members are separated based on marital status, there is no adequate guideline of how to best minister to singles. It is important for the church to set up a body who should address the issues with the single people in the church, rather than assigning the responsibility to just any church leaders, who are not necessarily equipped to minister to the single.

Some of the reasons that have militated against properly addressing the issue of the African American singles in church include the fact that African Americans have over the years experienced increasing cases of singleness; the number of cases of early marriages is also increasing among African Americans; their family structure has the support of the extended family, which plays a key role in helping raise the children born by singles among them.

Caucasians do not have as high cases of singleness as the African Americans, but Caucasians are open to singleness. Caucasians appreciate singles in their midst and similarly attach high value to family life.

Asians keep a tight bond among them and marry among their people. There are very few cases of intermarriages and this reduces the chances of being influenced by other cultures to accept some things such as singleness. In the Asian culture, singleness is not appreciated. People are expected to marry and have families of their own once mature. A high percentage of adult Asians are in marriages.

Africans also appreciate the family unit and believe that families should not be broken but developed to become successful. Although there are small cases of divorce and singleness, the African culture teaches that people should be married and have families. The level of education among African and Latino women is lower; hence they rely on their husbands most of the time for direction. This causes a limitation from divorcing and staying single; thus, maintaining the family unit even when there are serious challenges.

Singles enjoy personal freedom, and when rightly applied, this freedom enhances personal relationship with God. A stable relationship with God could generate a personal transformation that would guarantee bringing into their lives husbands, wives, good friends, and family. Marriage is destined to be for “better or for worse.” In society today, accepting and enduring marriage “for worse” is fast becoming a concept of the past. For marriage to last it has to be or promise “for better.” Singles are afraid of marital collapse seen all around and so to avoid a catastrophic relationship demise, remaining single becomes a better option. Regardless of the culture, knowing Jesus is the key for singles to be successful, happy, and fulfilled. Generally, singleness is growing in society and the church needs to accept this fact and support single people as persons who are as important as everyone else in the community and church.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to develop, implement, and evaluate a support program to serve the unique needs of singles 30 years and over who show positive interest in participating in a singles' ministry at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church. The study was designed to determine the impact the singles' ministry has on the church and how to shape the ministry in the future.

The ministry context of this study was focused on singles in the church, with the intent of (a) establishing lines of nurturing, (b) developing a cohesive relationship among single persons, and (c) fostering a sense of collective action for a single's ministry at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church. The following research questions were used to guide the research aimed at developing, implementing, and evaluating a support program to serve the needs of singles:

1. Are singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church content with the level of singles' activities?
2. Can singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church benefit socially from the implementation of a singles' ministry?
3. Can singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church benefit spiritually from the implementation of a singles' ministry?

Method

For this project, I used qualitative research. I employed the use of questionnaires, which were distributed to single men and women who attend Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church and who live within Riverside County and its environs; seminars, which included movies, speakers, and discussions; and focus group discussions.

Recruiting Procedures

After obtaining authorization from the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church board (see Appendix A), because all meetings were to be held during potlucks, I placed invitations to the potlucks in the church bulletin (see Appendix B). I then established a seven-member advisory group to assist in the scheduling of data collection, administering surveys, planning potlucks, and encouraging focus group participation. Later, to reach as many singles as possible for the focus groups, I used the services of Sabbath School teachers to distribute invitations for the focus group meetings (see Appendix C). The teachers distributed and instructed the participants to place the responses in a drop-box that was provided in the class and also at the church welcome/reception center. Focus group members were also recruited during the potlucks. Of the 30 potential participants who attended the potluck, 10 agreed to participate (approximately 33%).

The main activities of this project were to administer the surveys; present several seminars focusing on the issue of “church life” as single persons—how

single people can live to reach their full potential, emotionally, socially, and spiritually; and obtain further information from the focus groups.

Data Collection

The data came from surveys, administered at a potluck to ten men and women between the ages of 30 and 59 who attend Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church, who live within Riverside County and its environs, and who indicated interest in participating in a singles' ministry group. The data from the surveys was anonymous and confidential; no names were written on completed surveys. To further secure and maintain confidentiality, each survey paper was returned in an envelope addressed to the investigator, but without the name or address of the participant. Participants were free to return the envelopes through the office of the church secretary or into the drop-box provided at the church's reception center. The data was collected the same day where possible and at different times within the next two weeks. Use of black pens was encouraged for uniformity and to reduce the risk of personal identity. The data was secured on a password-protected computer. No recordings of any kind were used.

The first potluck was scheduled for a Sabbath after church service in which singles were given an opportunity to share. The sole agenda was sharing and getting acquainted. A single item survey was given to the potluck participants, asking them to identify a subject of interest by answering the question: "What subject matter would you be interested in having a guest lecturer present to you dealing with church life?" The responses triggered the following topics:

- A view of singleness a gift
- Living solo in a married world
- Being single and spiritual life

One and a half months after the first potluck, I presented a seminar potluck focusing on singleness as a gift, a topic of church life selected by the group and set up by the advisory group. The first activity of the seminar was administration of the questionnaire (see Appendix D). Informed consent was implied by participants' completion of the survey and based on Andrews University protocol (see Appendix E). The survey included (a) demographic information to help describe and define the singles at church in order to better represent their needs, (b) questions on whether single persons in this church feel accepted and involved, (c) questions on singles' quality of relationships inside and outside the church to paint a detailed picture of singles' views on the church's response and ministry to them, (d) a hierarchical ranking of emotions currently experienced by singles to help in addressing worship topics and lectures/activities, and (e) questions on the aspects of church life that would help to help in addressing worship topics and lectures/activities.

One and a half months later at the next potluck, the video entitled "Living My Full Potential Where God Wants Me" was shown. Following the video, small breakout groups discussed the role of singles in church and society.

At the next potluck (one month later) the video entitled "Being Single and Spiritual Life" was shown. In order to establish permanence and viability, the

advisory group scheduled to meet once a month during the next seven months. I functioned as group advisor in a voluntary pastoral role.

In the next few months, three more Sabbath potlucks were held. The topics, determined by the leadership group, were related to the responses given at the initial potluck. At the end of the scheduled potlucks came a potluck in which a general focus group dialogue was held for the purpose of evaluating the impact of this ongoing singles' ministry that had now been established at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church. I took notes during the meetings for the purpose of data analysis. The following open-ended questions were asked:

What impact has the singles' ministry had on your view of the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church?

What have the singles' ministry activities meant for you?

How would you shape this singles' ministry for the future?

At the end of the entire process, a focus group was formed to determine what was learned by this ministry and its implementation at this particular church. For the focus group invitation and questions, see Appendixes C and F, respectively. The focus group consisted of seven participants who had attended the potlucks but may or may not have filled out the original surveys, since that data was anonymous.

Demographics

The survey included demographic questions (questions 1 through 4) to identify some basic statistical information and to enable the breakdown of data into meaningful groups. These groupings enhance assessment in the form of cross

tabulation. The demographic questions for this study include gender, age, highest level of education attained, and current work status.

Participants consisted of four males and six females (see Figure 2). Age groups were categorized into ages 30 to 39, 40 to 49, and 50 to 59. In the study, four of the participants were 30 to 39 years; four were 40 to 49 years, and two were 50 to 59 years (see Figure 3). Figure 4 shows the education level as six of the participants having a 4-year college degree or Master's degree, and two having a 2-year college degree. Out of the two participants remaining, one had some college education, and the other's highest level of education attained was a high school /GED.

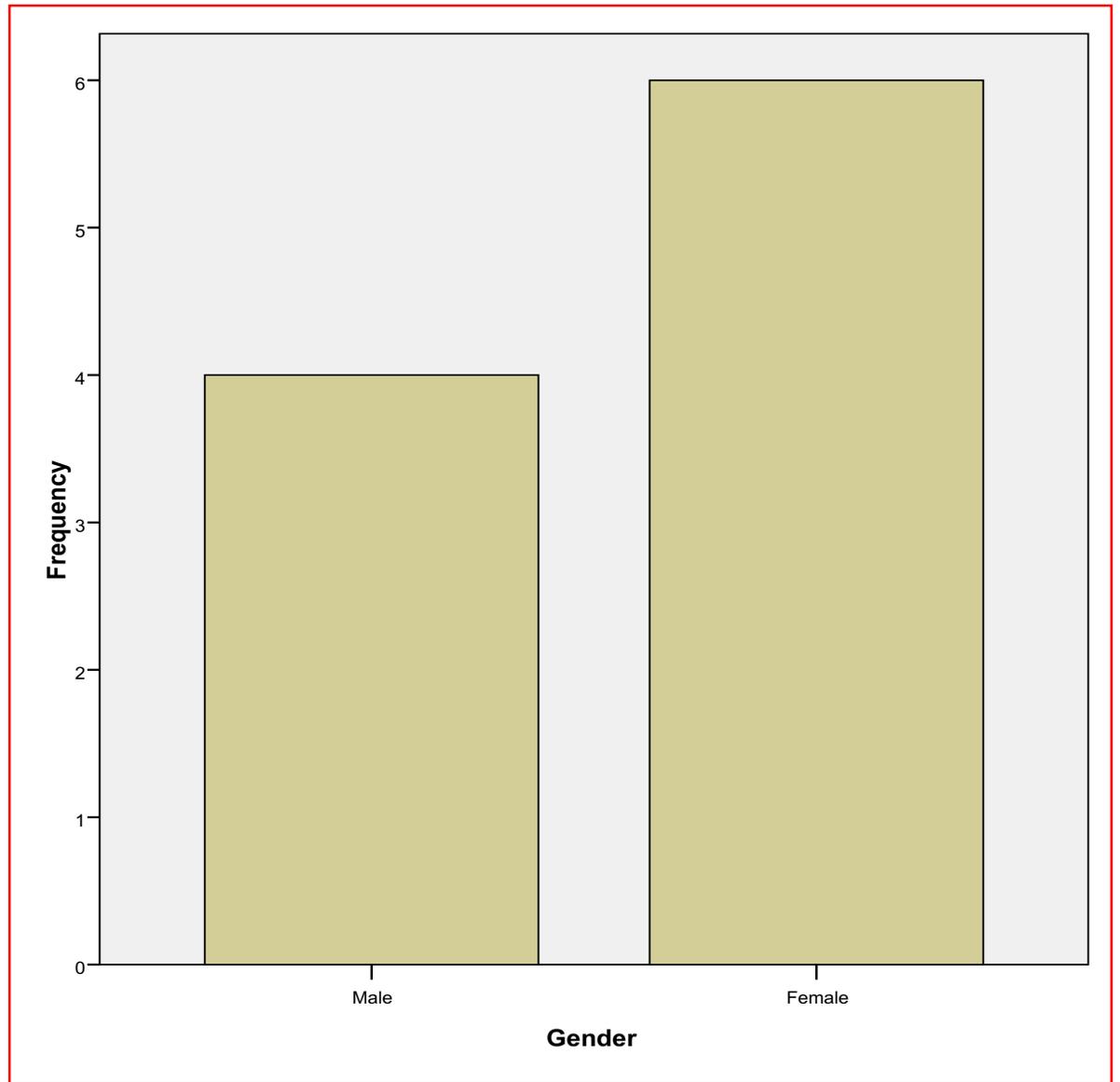


Figure 2. Participants' gender.

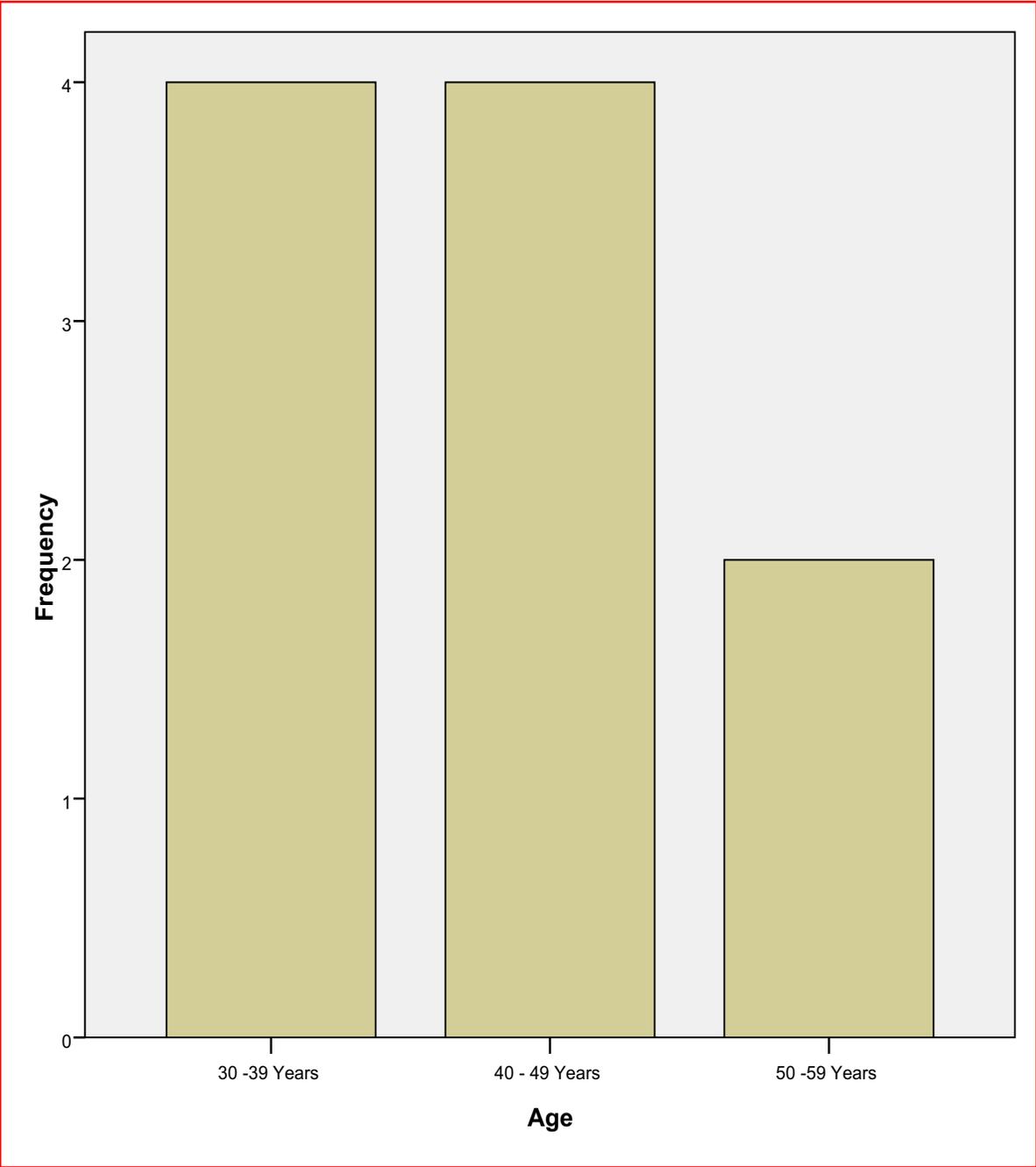


Figure 3. Ages of participants.

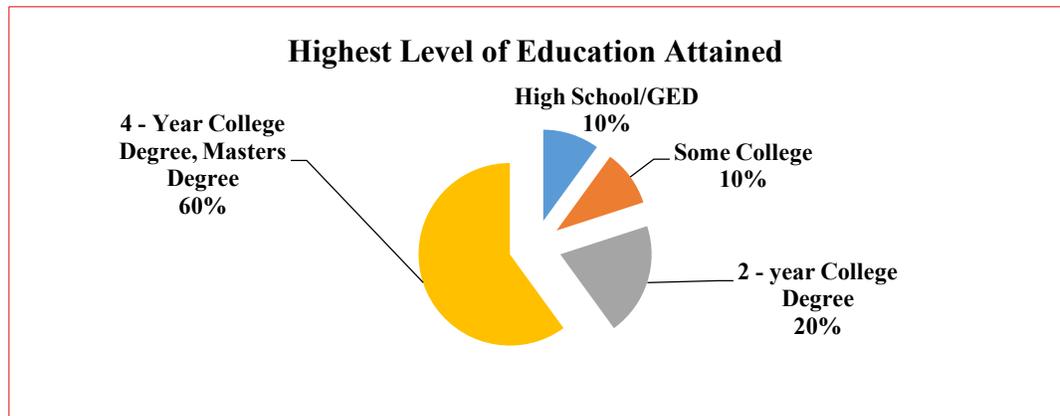


Figure 4. Participants' education.

Out of the four participants in the age 30 to 39 group, two were males and two were females. One of the males had some college education; one had a 4-year college degree or Master's degree. One female participant within the age 30 to 39 group had a 2-year college degree, while the other female participant had a 4-year college degree or Master's degree.

Out of the four participants in the age 40 to 49 group, three were females and one was male. The male and two of the females had a 4-year college degree or Master's degree. Only one of the females in the group had only a high school/GED education. One participant in the age 50 to 59 group is a male with a 2-year college degree and one is a female with a 4-year college degree or Master's degree. Table 1 shows the age and education levels of the participants.

Table 1

Age and Level of Education Attained by Participants

	30-39 Years	40-49 Years	50-59 Years	30-39 Years	40-49 Years	50- 59 Years
High school/GED	-	-	-	-	1	-
Some college	1	-	-	-	-	-
2-year college degree	-	-	1	1	-	-
4-year college degree or Master's degree	1	1	-	1	2	1

Eight of the participants in the study work full time while two work part time. All of the female participants have full time work. Only two of the male participants work full time; the remaining two work part time (see Table 2).

One of the females with full time work has a high school/GED; four of the females who have full time work have a 4-year college degree or Master's degree; one of the females has a 2-year college degree. The two males with full time work both have a 4-year college degree. One of the males with part time work has a 2-year college degree; the other one has had some college education. Figure 5 charts the work status of the participants. Six of the participants work full time and have a 4-year college or Master's degree.

Table 2

Gender, Highest Level of Education Attained, Work Status of Participants

Current Work Status	Male		Female	
	Full time	Part Time	Full time	Part Time
High School/GED	-	-	1	-
Some college	-	1	-	-
2-year college degree	-	1	1	-
4-year college degree or Master's degree	2	-	4	-

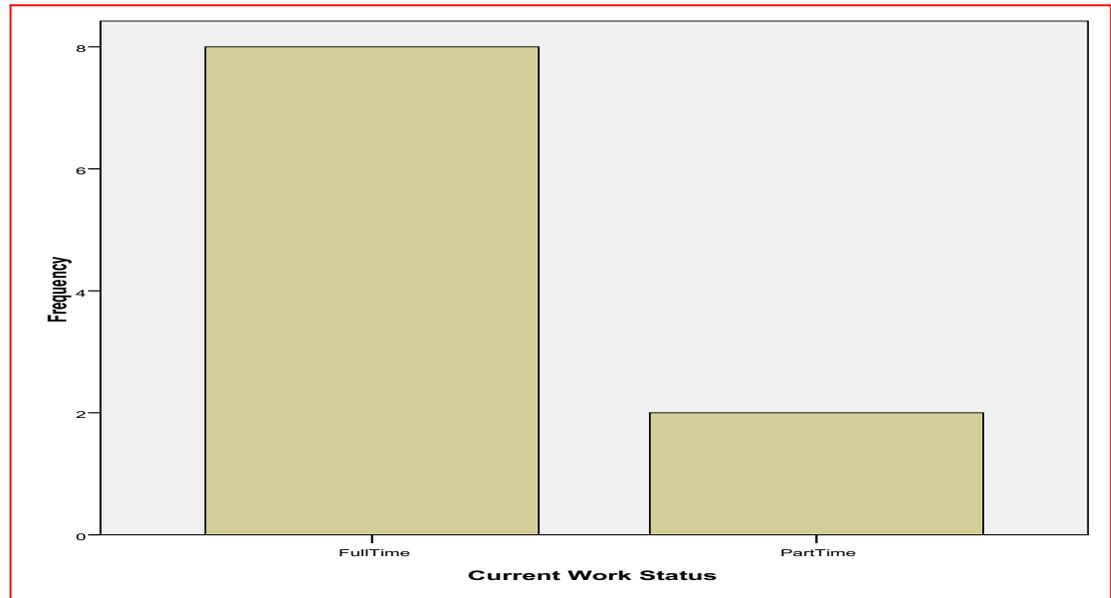


Figure 5. Work status of participants.

Responses to Question 5—Church Relationships

This section of the survey was designed to examine the church's relationship with singles, and to measure the relationships existing among participants and church members and non-church members. For each of the questions the participant was asked to select a rank response of Poor = 1, Fair = 2, Good = 3, Very Good = 4, and Excellent = 5. Three queries are treated in this section.

Single Friendliness

In answer to the question, *How single friendly is this church?* one of the participants rated the church's singles friendship level as poor, six indicated that it is fair, and three indicated that it is good. All of the female participants except one indicated that the church relationship with singles is fair. Two of the male participants indicated that the church's friendship level to singles is good. The two males with this response have different work statuses (one works full time the other works part time), different educational levels (one had a 2-year college degree and the other had a 4-year college degree and Master's degree) and belong to different age groups (one is in the age 30 to 39 group, and the other is in the age 50 to 59 group). One of the full-time working males with a 4-year college degree and Master's degree in the age 40 to 49 group indicated poor; another with some college education indicated fair. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 3.

Table 3

Responses to Church Relationship to Singles

Educational Level	Age	Work Status	Male			Female	
			Poor	Fair	Good	Fair	Good
High school/GED	40 – 49	Full time	-	-	-	1	-
Some college	30 – 39	Part Time	-	1	-	-	-
2-year college degree	30 – 39	Full Time	-	-	-	-	1
2-year college degree	50 – 59	Part Time	-	-	1	-	-
4-year college/Master’s	40 – 49	Full Time	1	-	-	2	-
4-year college/Master’s	30 – 39	Full Time	-	-	1	1	-
4-year college/Master’s	50 – 59	Full Time	-	-	-	1	-

Quality of Contact With People in the Church

When asked to *Describe the quality of your contact with the people in the church*, five of the participants described the quality of their contact with church members as good, three indicated that it is fair; and two indicated excellent. Half of the males in the study had fair quality contact with church members and the other half had good quality contact. Two females indicated having an excellent quality contact with church members; this is the same proportion for those having good contact. One female described her contact with people in the church as fair, and one described it as very good.

Two of the males who have a 4-year college degree or Master’s degree with full time employment, and one male with some college and a part time job described their relationship with church members as good. On the other hand, one male with a part time job and a 2-year college degree rated his quality of contact with people in the church as fair. All female participants in the age group 30 -39

years indicated an excellent contact with people in the church. Two of the females with 4-year college degrees within the ages of 40 to 59 said they have good quality contact with church members. As shown in Figure 6, singles generally have a fair relationship with church members. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 4.

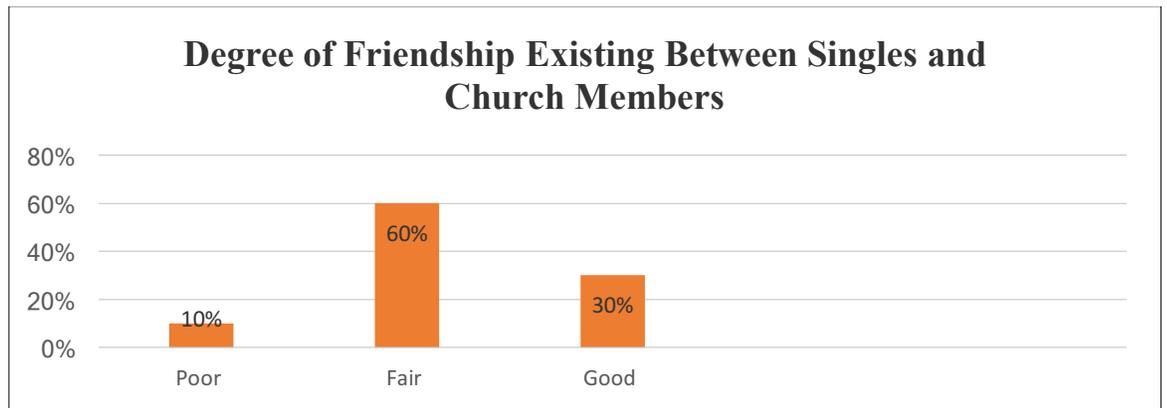


Figure 6. Degree of friendship existing between singles and church members.

Table 4

Responses to Quality of Contact With People in the Church

Educational Level	Age	Work Status	Male		Female		Very Good	Excellent
			Fair	Good	Fair	Good		
High school/GED	40 – 49	FT	-	-	1	-	-	-
Some college	30 – 39	PT	-	1	-	-	-	-
2-yr college degree	30 – 39	FT	-	-	-	-	-	1
2-yr college degree	50 – 59	PT	1	-	-	-	-	-
4-yr college/ Master’s	40 – 49	FT	-	1	-	1	1	-
4-yr college/ Master’s	30 – 39	FT	-	1	-	-	-	1
4-yr college/ Master’s	50 – 59	FT	-	-	-	1	-	-

Quality of Contact With People Outside the Church

When asked to *Describe the quality of your contact with people outside the church*, three of the participants described the quality of their contact with people outside the church as good. Four of the participants have excellent relationships with people outside the church. One participant each has poor and very good quality contact with people outside the church. Two males and two females have excellent quality contact with people outside the church. One male and one female have very good contact with people outside the church. Out of the six participants with a 4-year college degree or Master's degree, two each have good, very good, and excellent quality contact with people outside the church. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 5.

The majority of the participants have good quality contact and excellent contact with both members of the church and people outside the church. Figure 7 is a summary of the quality of relationships and level of friendship existing between singles and church members.

Table 5

Responses to Quality of Contact With People Outside the Church

Educational Level	Age	Work Status	Male			Female		
			Poor	Very Good	Excellent	Good	Very Good	Excellent
High school/GED	40 – 49	Full time	-	-	-	1	-	-
Some college	30 – 39	Part time	-		1	-	-	-
2-year college degree	30 – 39	Full time	-	-	-	-	-	1
2-year college degree	50 – 59	Part time	1	-	-	-	-	-
4-yr college/Master’s	40 – 49	Full time	-	-	1	1	1	-
4-yr college/Master’s	30 – 39	Full time	-	1	-	-	-	1
4-yr college/Master’s	50 – 59	Full time	-	-	-	1	-	-

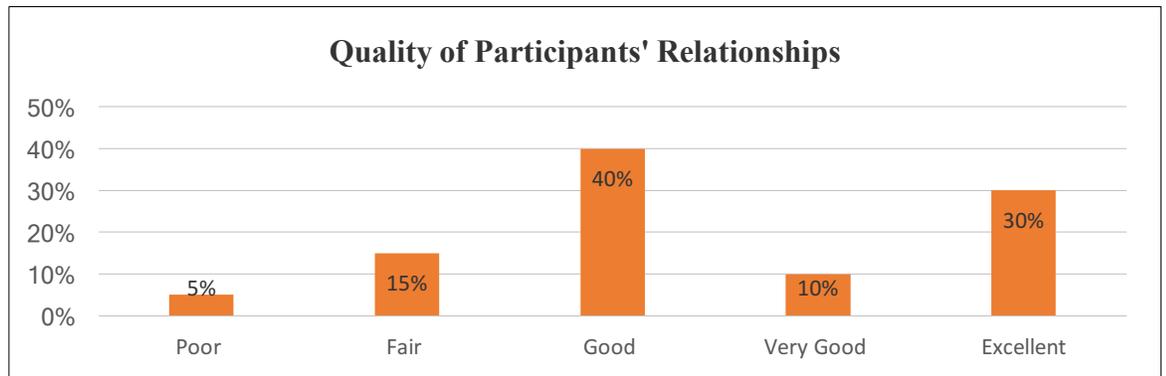


Figure 7. Quality of relationships of participants.

Responses to Question 6—Experiences and Attitudes

This section of the survey was designed to examine the participants’ experiences and attitudes concerning being single at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church. For each of the statements the participant was asked to

select a rank response of *Strongly agree*, *Agree*, *Somewhat agree*, *Somewhat disagree*, *Disagree*, *Strongly disagree*, or *No response*.

Mt. Rubidoux’s Relationship to Singles

When asked to respond to the statement, *Mt Rubidoux Church needs to re-evaluate its relationship with single persons*, six of the participants responded *strongly agree*; another three responded *agree*. One of the male participants did not respond to the question. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 6.

Table 6
Re-evaluation of Relationship

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	2	1	-	-	-	-	1
Female	4	2	-	-	-	-	-
Total	6	3					1

Social Isolation

When asked to respond to the statement, *I experience social isolation*, five of the participants responded *disagree*. The breakdown between males and females disagreeing was half of the males (2) and half of the females (3). Three participants responded *somewhat agree*, one responded *agree*, and one responded *strongly agree*. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 7.

Table 7

Social Isolation

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	1	-	1	-	2	-	-
Female	-	1	2	-	3	-	-
				-		-	-
Total	1	1	3		5		

Stigmatization

When asked to respond to the statement, *I experience stigmatization*, six participants responded *disagree* and two responded *strongly disagree*. Only one participant responded *agree*, and one responded *somewhat agree*. A total of three male and five female participants responded that they do not experience stigmatization. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 8.

Table 8

Experience Stigmatization

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	-	-	1	-	2	1	-
Female	-	1	-	-	4	1	-
Total		1	1		6	2	

Loneliness in Church

When asked to respond to the statement, *I experience loneliness in church*, two participants responded *strongly agree*, three (all females) responded *somewhat agree*, one responded *somewhat disagree*, one responded *disagree*, and

one responded *strongly disagree*. Two participants did not respond to the question.

A total of four females agreed that they experience loneliness in church, while only one male agreed that he experiences loneliness. This disparity could be an aspect of the males' denial of inner feelings. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 9.

Table 9

Loneliness in Church

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	1	-	-	1	1	-	1
Female	1	-	3	-	-	1	1
Total	2		3	1	1	1	2

Family Pressure to Marry

When asked to respond to the statement, *I experience pressure to marry from my family*, one participant responded *strongly disagree*, three responded *disagree*, two responded *strongly agree*, two responded *somewhat agree*, and one responded *agree*. One of the female participants did not respond to the question. Half of the male and half of the female participants agreed that they experience pressure from their family to get married. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 10.

Table 10

Pressure From Family

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	1	1	-	-	1	1	-
Female	1	-	2	-	2	-	1
Total	2	1	2		3	1	1

Pressure From Married Peers in the Church

When asked to respond to the statement, *I experience pressure to marry from my married peers in this church*, three responded *disagree*, two responded *strongly agree*, two responded *somewhat agree*, one responded *agree*, one responded *somewhat disagree*, and one responded *strongly disagree*. Three of the four males did not agree that they experience pressure to marry from their married peers in the church. However, only two of the six females did not agree that they experience pressure to marry from their married peers in the church. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 11.

Table 11

Pressure From the Church

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	1	-	-	1	1	1	-
Female	1	1	2	-	2	-	-
Total	2	1	2	1	3	1	

Being Part of a Singles' Ministry

When asked to respond to the statement, *I would like to be part of the singles' ministry*, three of the participants responded *strongly agree*, three responded *agree*, and two responded *somewhat agree*, and two responded *disagree*. Three of the four male participants agreed that they would like to be part of the singles' ministry, and five of the six females agreed that they would like to be part of the singles' ministry. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 12.

Table 12

Would Like to be Part of the Singles' Ministry

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	1	1	1	-	1	-	-
Female	2	2	1	-	1	-	-
Total	3	3	2		2		

Feeling Gifted

When asked to respond to the statement, *I feel gifted to serve God in singleness*, three of the participants responded *disagree*, two responded *agree*, two responded *somewhat disagree*, one responded *strongly agree*, and one responded *somewhat agree*. In terms of gender, three of the four male participants disagreed with the statement. One male did not respond to the statement. On the contrary, four of the six female participants agreed with the statement. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 13.

Table 13

Feeling Gifted

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	-	-	-	1	2	-	1
Female	1	2	1	1	1	-	-
						-	
Total	1	2	1	2	3		1

Attention for Single Adults

When asked to respond to the statement, *Children and families get more attention than single adults*, three of the participants responded *strongly agree*, three responded *somewhat agree*, two responded *agree*, and two responded *disagree*. All male participants agreed that children and families get more attention than single adults. Only two of the six females disagreed. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 14.

Table 14

Attention for Single Adults

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	2	-	2	-	-	-	-
Female	1	2	1	-	2	-	-
				-		-	-
Total	3	2	3		2		

Belonging and Acceptance

When asked to respond to the statement, *I feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in my singleness*, one of the participants responded *disagree*, one

responded *strongly disagree*, three responded *somewhat agree*, three responded *agree*, and two responded *strongly agree*. A total of eight participants agreed that they feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in being single. Out of these, three were male and five were female. Only one female responded *strongly disagree*. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 15.

Table 15

Sense of Belonging and Acceptance

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	1	1	1	-	1	-	-
Female	1	2	2	-		1	-
				-			-
Total	2	3	3		1	1	

Enhanced Spirituality

When asked to respond to the statement, *Being single has enhanced my spirituality*, three of the participants responded *agree*, two responded *strongly agree*, two responded *somewhat agree*, one responded *somewhat disagree*, and two responded *disagree*. In terms of gender, three of the four males agreed that singleness enhances their spirituality; for the female participants, four of the six agreed. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 16.

Table 16

Single Enhanced Spirituality

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	1	1	1	-	1	-	-
Female	1	2	1	1	1	-	-
Total	2	3	2	2	2	-	-

Happy Being Single

When asked to respond to the statement, *I am happy being Single*, two of the participants responded strongly agree, two responded *agree*, two responded *somewhat agree*, two responded *somewhat disagree*, and two responded *disagree*. Specifically, two of the four male participants indicated that they strongly agree. One agreed and one disagreed that they are happy being single. Two of the females somewhat agreed and two somewhat disagreed. One female agreed and one disagreed. A full breakdown of responses appears in Table 17.

Table 17

Happy Being Single

	SA	A	SMA	SMD	D	SD	NR
Male	2	1	-	-	1	-	-
Female	-	1	2	2	1	-	-
Total	2	2	2	2	2	-	-

Participants' Improvement Suggestions

The open-ended query, *Suggest what you would like to be done to improve singles' ministry in this church*, was posed to both the survey participants and the focus group. Of the four male participants in the survey, only two responded to this question. They suggested that communication is lacking between singles and church leadership. In their opinion, church leadership is expected to be inclusive in providing activities and service positions that foster a sense of belonging to the church body as a whole. In addition, they look to church leadership to help in getting singles to know and relate with each other socially and spiritually. The other half did not respond. Among the female participants, five out of the six responded to this question. One did not respond. The core suggestion was for singles to be allowed to have a ministry of their own and not to be ignored by a church that pays more attention to others like the married and children. Two suggested the necessity for the church to introduce social services platforms, which include activities like Bible study, prayer ministries, weekly vespers, and outings in which they can have quality interactions that lead to social and spiritual fulfillment, and ultimately, wholeness in Christ.

CHAPTER 5

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement, and evaluate a support program to serve the needs of singles based on the responses to the survey and subsequent discussions. This section presents the significance of the answers to the survey questions and the discussion in the focus group as they pertain to the following research questions:

1. Are singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church content with the level of singles' activities?
2. Can singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church benefit socially from the implementation of a singles' ministry?
3. Can singles in the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church benefit spiritually from the implementation of a singles' ministry?

Singles, like couples or young adults, come to church not only to share their unique spiritual gifts as individuals but also to find release for whatever problems they experience or are experiencing in life. Loneliness was a significant struggle for a majority of the respondents in this study as 70% of the respondents admitted to experiencing loneliness in church due to lack of inclusiveness in choice of words and programs that are more specific and beneficial to married people and children. While there is an obvious need for a ministry suited to their

peculiar needs and expectations, singles are looking to the church to help enhance their spirituality.

Independence

Eight of the 10 participants in this study work full time and two work part time. All of the female participants work full time. As the lives of women have evolved over time, more women have acquired more power through education, access to job opportunities, travel, and independence. This development has resulted in more independence to do whatever things they wished to do on their own, including remaining single by choice. Women who truly want to devote their life for service do not see it necessary anymore to have husbands (ideally, partners should be more than providing bread), just as the case of some women in the Bible.

One participant echoed the voice of others:

I really would like to marry if a Godly man comes my way. However, it would rather be better for me to be single, do good to some child or children by adoption than to yoke myself with an immature man who does not know God, feels highly entitled because he is ‘a man’ and face the pain of divorce or separation sooner or later. For me to knowingly step into such a relationship would be a betrayal of my womanhood and a dis-service to God and my church”. I would rather live independently, use my time to travel, do missionary work, accomplish my educational and social dreams as I serve my God with happiness wherever my services are recognized and appreciated.

This clearly showed an understanding within the singles group of the importance of self-sufficiency– “a characteristic demanded by a single life” (Widder, as cited by Cresswell, 2014, p. 15).

Another participant wrote:

It seems that there are lot of women to pick from, not just in the churches but also from the internet and un-churched community. To a large extent, their

expectations from a man are way too high whereas the girls themselves are not perfect. Moreover, there is also pressure from church and family who try very often to match us me with ladies of their choice. Quite often, it does not work out. I'd rather live my singular self; I am quite well accomplished and satisfied with my job at this point than to begin to create an unhealthy relationship. I might change my mind later. What the church should do is to plan educational, spiritual and social programs, conference wide singles camp meetings for us all singles so that both male and female would learn how best to understand and cherish each other.

Most of the men in the study who indicated a reason for their singleness seem to play the blame game. While the ladies blame the men for not being “manly” enough to approach them, the men blame the women for being too picky, and dreamy with very high expectations from a man. Single women are often accused of worldliness in appearance, and so the men feel, “what’s the point? This is playing double standards; we might as well find your likes outside of the pews.” On the other hand, the men encounter ladies who are seriously interested in finding a mature spiritual mate. Such ladies treasure their sexuality and obedience to God. They want no time wasters, or such men whose sole interest is to “play and dump.”

On the impact of the singles’ ministry to Mt Rubidoux church, the response was that such a ministry would provide an opportunity for singles to get to know each other better; to harmonize their skills and talents in outreach, which is a strong focus of personal ministry in the church; for each one to have a sense of personal fulfillment in service; and to have a sense of recognition as a body like other ministries in the church. In relation to what the singles’ ministry meant for the participants, the response was that it is a way of realizing a personal

commitment to contribute to the growth of their fellow singles and the church at large.

To shape the ministry for the future would mean getting church leadership to be intentional about including singles' ministry in the calendar of activities for the entire year, making sure that not only families, but singles are recognized on the worship floor. Singles' ministry should have a leadership board of elders that will include even some married persons for guidance. Seminars and educational events should be planned that encourage and empower singles not to forgo their femininity or masculinity but to celebrate their personhood in a godly and timely manner. Whether singlehood is by choice or chance or another circumstance, the ministry is to enable its members understand and accept God's sufficiency and his promise to meet every individual need.

Need for Activities

The nature of single life demands finding social and spiritual ties that discourage boredom, loneliness, and getting involved in things that bring happiness for oneself and others by living a life of productivity, joy, and unregretful solitude. It is important to implement the suggestions as responded to in the open-ended question, which spoke about the need for cohesive activities and church recognition. For example, one participant suggested that the church provide "intentional activities for singles that are enjoyable, fulfilling, and spiritual." Another said that the church needed "more communication," and that activities should give singles "a sense of belonging. It need not be a social club,

but a group that fosters quality spiritual growth and fellowship among this population.” Here are other responses to ways to improve singles ministries:

“Pray for them and connect them to potential spouses”

“They should be allowed to have a ministry and not be ignored. Too much focus on married and children”

“A committee willing to put time in to bring us together”

“Social activities”

“Have one ministry started”

“Good mixture; diversity of male and females”

“Bible study and prayer ministry would assist in being whole in Christ”

This need for activities was also seen in the response to the question on contact. Four of the 10 participants described the quality of their contact with church members as good. Two of the males in the study had a fair quality contact with church members and the other two had good quality contact with people in the church.

Happiness

Single people live great and interesting lives that married people may not be able to remember having lived. In the focus group discussion, singles reported that they are less disturbed by husbands and children and thus they get adequate rest unlike married people, who face spousal issues, unabated family responsibility, and moral and social expectation to raise and nurture children. They did not put married life in a negative joyless sense, but saw it as a permanent and possibly limiting commitment. Similarly, their chances of being

depressed are lower because the issue of anticipating a husband is no longer there to worry about.

In concurrence with this finding, an article from the University of Auckland Australia (2015) finds, “Singles are just as happy as those in relationships.”

Singles are confronting boredom, loneliness, and social isolation by getting involved in things that bring happiness for themselves and others and by living a life of productivity, joy, and unregretful solitude. Four of the participants are doing this by having a good quality relationship with church members and maintaining contact with them. Two of males in the study had a fair quality contact with church members. In the focus group discussion, participants reported that they have enough time to socialize with friends, which, in their opinion, makes them happier and less disturbed than those who are married. Being single gives them enough time to socialize with friends, which makes them happier, as indicated by two of the participants.

Loneliness and happiness are both migrant emotions. Single persons like everyone else have lonely feelings, but for a single person, loneliness is compounded by social judgment of the status quo and limitations beyond their control. Singles conquer negative feelings through perseverance, personal responsibility, and accountability. However, as iron sharpens iron (Prov 27:17), so singles need to draw strength from the experiences and encouragement from other singles.

When studying the scriptures, single people in church can pick up courage from the lives and waiting of biblical single achievers. According to David Hoffeditz (1996), single adults mentioned in Scripture were each unique in what they were known for—a faithful life following the Lord as much as they understood. Hoffeditz narrates the following:

Paul: The ‘Gift’ of Singleness. The apostle described the value of living contentedly where God placed him—whether or not he had been “gifted” with singleness or marriage (1 Cor. 7:7).

Anna: Left at the Altar. With seemingly little to contribute to society, the widow Anna was willing to rest in the Lord as she actively served him in the temple and marked her life with praise (Luke 2:36–38).

Martha: Living Life in the Fast Lane. Martha illustrates that single adults, and even married adults for that matter, can easily allow the busyness of life to distract from their worship of the Lord (Luke 10:38–42).

Jeremiah: All Alone in a Couple’s World. Jeremiah was able to serve productively and face loneliness because he recognized the Lord called him (Jer. 1:1–9), trusted in God’s control (17:7), possessed God’s perspective (1:12), prayed continually (21:2; 29:7,12; 37:3; 42:2,4,20), and benefitted from the help of others (38:7–13).

Ruth: Encountering Shattered Dreams. In the midst of hurts, Ruth’s life was marked by an expression of sacrificial love, a faithful adherence to a commitment, and a hope rooted in faith (Book of Ruth).

Joseph: Purity in the Midst of Temptation. Joseph understood the various traits of temptation, recognized the destruction of sin, and grew in his affection for the Lord (Gen. 37–50).

Nehemiah. Not Going “A-Wall” (i.e., AWOL). Despite immense adversity, Nehemiah remained faithful to the Lord and his people (Book of Nehemiah).

John the Baptist: Always a Groomsman, Never a Groom. John exhibited a motivation to follow Christ as John abandoned the world no matter what the sacrifice (John 3:22–30; Matt. 14:1–12). (para. 1-8)

Other single achievers in history can also influence the singles in the church: Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), an American impressionist artist, said, “I am independent! I can live alone and I love to work” (Cassatt, n.d.). Another person was Jane Austen, who in November 1814, said, “Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection” (n.d.). Yet another was Nikola Tesla, an eclectic scientist who said,

I do not think there is any thrill that can go through the human heart like that felt by the inventor as he sees some creation of the brain unfolding to success... such emotions make a man forget food, sleep, friends, love, everything.” (n.d.)

Courage to wait means that singles can live insightful lives and achieve personal fulfillment to contribute to society and the church. Thus, an insightful life is not necessarily found in marital union.

Challenges of Negative Perception

The greatest challenge singles face is not loneliness, stigmatization of their status, or pressure from peers. The challenge is rather the contradictions between the Bible value of singles and the church’s perception of singles. These challenges include negative perception of singleness in church and family. A focus group participant mentioned her challenge in this way:

I'm tired of the church. Although I tried to be involved for years and even held several leadership positions, as I got older, I became more aware of the limited voice single women like me have in the church. In my denomination, we can't teach men or lead worship. And, if unmarried and childless, we're limited within women's ministries as well. Many times, we aren't allowed to use our God-given talents to the fullest.

In Scripture, “the single life is honored and commended through both personal example and teaching” (Erikson, as cited in Cresswell, 2014, p. 15). For

instance, Paul wished that all people were single as he was (1 Cor 7:8) and wrote of the advantage in ministry that a single woman has over a married woman (1 Cor 7:34). “Both the Old and New Testaments have examples of single men and women who were used by God for his service” (Koons & Anthony, as cited in Cresswell, 2014, p. 9). These include Elijah, Daniel, Jesus, and Paul. However, a contrast exists between spiritual service at that period of religious history and most common Christian practices today that require marriage as one of the conditions for official appointment in church work.

The responses to the questionnaire information revealed implicitly the thinking of participants on singleness. In the study, although half of the participants disagreed that they experience social isolation, and eight out of 10 participants responded that they do not experience stigmatization, loneliness was a significant struggle for majority of the participants in this study as seven participants out of the 10 agreed that they experience loneliness in church. In terms of gender, four of the six females responded that they experience loneliness as did one of the four males. But it is doubtful to say that these participants see marriage as the cure for loneliness. Rather, Sturt (1996), as cited by Cresswell (2014), defines loneliness as a “situation where one receives from other people in a social network less than what one expects” (p. 3). This writer believes that loneliness stems from the non-inclusive phrases and character of the church towards singles rather than the lack of a life partner. It was observed in the survey that out of the six females, two had excellent quality contact with church members and three had good or very good contact. Three out of the four males indicated

having a good quality contact with church members. Singles feel lonely just like others because loneliness is universal (Nouwen, 1986). But in the focus group, two women expressed that some choices of words used in church like “families should sit together” create feelings of loneliness and alienation. Thus, the church subconsciously reinforces the feelings of loneliness in church. Here is an account from a focus group member:

For about two years, I attended a nearby church in my small town. However, I left that congregation because I didn't feel I, a single, 42-year-old guy, fit in with that community's strong focus on family activities. When I tried to share my perspective, people said, ‘You just want to go to a church that has more single women.’ In reality, I was looking for a church family that included everyone in true community.

I now drive 45 minutes to a larger church that's taking steps to include everyone. Most of the sermons and activities are still for couples or families or young adults. But recently the pastor announced he was dividing the church into teams of 15 to 20 people. Each group includes a young married couple, a senior couple, a couple with kids, a couple with adult kids, and at least one single person. When I heard this plan, I knew I was in the right place.

There is a tendency for the church to exalt the status of marriage to be equal with oneness with Christ, which gives much recognition to the married members and to the family. Since to many, the sense of identity comes from relationships, many people do not only gain a sense of identity from their relationships but also self-awareness. It follows that undue attention to married people and children leaves singles feeling they do not belong to anyone. This kind of situation creates an identity crisis in the minds of the singles, leading them to constantly struggle with the question of who they are. A contributor to the Adventist Singles Adult Ministries publication (ASAM) had this opinion about who he is:

When I get a bit down about being a single (which is seldom) I remember that many of the married are sitting behind me, envying me, wishing they didn't have to head home with that old grump after church, wishing they could lie down in peace for their Sabbath afternoon nap, or just go sit on a mountain by themselves - at least once in their life! I try to smile at them kindly, knowing the terrible hurt and loneliness that lurks in their hearts, knowing how they suffer being married to the wrong person. (para. 46)

In the study a glimpse of the challenge of more attention to children and families is seen in the proportion of participants that decry this situation, all four males in the study responded that children and families get more attention than single adults. Only two of the six females disagreed.

This may suggest that there is a subconscious belief among some church members that singles need pity or assistance because they have fallen short of God's ideal plan. And the drive for acceptance is just a way out of their frustrations rather than a healthy and God-given part to self-actualization or fulfillment. According to Wright as cited by Cresswell (2014), "The church may need to emphasize more that our identity is in Christ and not in our marital status" (p. 3).

Challenges of Pressure to Marry

Five of the 10 participants responded that they experience pressure from their family to get married. It is important to emphasize that families have significant influence on a person's beliefs and practices. Most families interpret cultural messages about marriage and singlehood and whatever interpretation they give either reinforces an erroneous idea about singles or projects the biblical view. It was evident that half of the participants were pressured by their family to get married. As brothers and sisters in Christ, members belong to one spiritual family.

Church and family should be inseparable. Christians know that Jesus said that those who did the will of his heavenly Father were his family. Pressure on singles to marry exists because Jesus is not taken seriously. In some ways, the attitude of believers to singles in their midst is unhelpful and unjust. Christians might do well to think about the family of God as more eternal than the earthly kinfolk. This pressure shows the scope in which a message or sermon or seminar or ministry for singles might help in re-establishing a biblical view of singles in church instead of family, cultural, or secular views.

Besides pressure from family members, church members, especially married peers, feel uncomfortable with the notion that their friends or sisters and brothers in Christ “are not living normal.” These well-meaning members of the church suggest to the never-married that “the right one will come along soon or in God’s timing.” These persons are not reinforcing singleness as a biblically acceptable way of life; in fact, four of the six females responded that they experience pressure to marry from their married peers in the church.

The focus group discussion indicated that single people would like the church to review the kind of pressure they put on singles to marry. Christians run the risk of idolizing marriage whereas there were a number of singles in Scripture that had significant impact on the lives of the children of God. The expression of being “a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1) is typified in the lived experiences of such men and women in the Bible times. Thus, a single Christian person who is not distracted by family responsibilities is more likely to portray the character of Christ better in terms of stewardship of time and focus than the married. Maturity

is called for in every phase and status in life. The mature single person respects sexuality and personhood, expressing oneself with respect and dignity, warmth and kindness in relationship with others. It is in this sense that singles can carefully relate with everybody else with thoughtfulness and discretion. The single person has more time for self-respect as a sexual being, and more time for creativity and stewardship to others, because they can experience and practice a deeper level of service that might not readily be attained in a marital relationship. For instance, some single persons who love hospitality shared that they have more freedom to try to cook and even fail, and to entertain people more from successful cooking adventures than they could imagine accomplishing if they had to cook and provide for a family on a daily basis.

Two of the women in the focus group discussion remarked that they are constantly being told that they should wait upon the Lord, and nothing is too difficult for Him. These views seem to reinforce the idea that a single person is not complete. Never-married women and men may find such well-intentioned advice and concern rather oppressive. Church members should be agents in helping those who have never been married to live fully empowered joyous lives for Christ.

Alternatives

In the Igbo culture, to which I belong, marriage and child bearing is looked upon as an image of beauty and completeness. This paper would not be complete without including an observed trend that is a new dimension in family living today whereby single women adopt or bear children by artificial

insemination or surrogate motherhood. Single men also adopt children. The focus group said that those who choose this route to fulfillment are choosing what matters most to them. This is their expression of being single and feeling comfortable about it. It was viewed that through nurturing a newborn life or giving hope and emotional security to an adopted child, a single person can derive pleasure and satisfaction. This is an area for future study.

Summary of Findings

It is only through an increased awareness of the life of singles in our church and their struggles and challenges, and the understanding of their needs and biblical positions on the issue, that singles can reach their full potential. One focus member summed up the single experience in the church this way:

Because most church staff members are married, they believe marriage to be the norm. They do not think much about single, divorced, or widowed people, and certainly cannot identify with them. Churches identify the needs of children, youth, and other demographics, and believe strongly in figuring out how to reach them. Yet if I suggest to church staff members that single people are also a unique group—distinctly different from married folks—I often receive a blank stare.

The focus groups that met concluded that their primary concern was for a ministry in which singles can connect, meet, and discover their gifts for service in the church. Some of the issues expressed for a specialized ministry for singles included but were not limited to feeling loneliness and disconnectedness and having a limited voice to contribute to church administration. In their opinion, church leadership is a failure in that they seem desensitized to the needs of singles

and therefore, are not able to build bridges of understanding between the rest of the church and singles. Singles feel spiritually stagnated, frustrated, unloved, unwanted, and out-of-place, with a limited voice, since their viewpoints do not often count. Their talents and potentials are not adequately harnessed. The result is that singles, especially in a large church, become lost in the crowd, do not get involved, and are missed by none. Therefore, they become like a migrant group, searching for love, acceptance, and a place to share and shine their gifts and talents. Many of these opinions are manifested among those singles who are musically endowed. Furthermore, the Adventist Single Adult Ministries (ASAM), North American Division (2008), have encountered the same opinions. Many singles say their experiences in the church are almost disappointing and pathetic. They search for a warm, loving, accepting church community among whom they can worship, learn and grow. Singles need an honest and open discussion with members of the church in ministry, or studies such as this to help the church begin to realize that having a functional and well-structured singles' ministry can be a blessing to the church and society.

CHAPTER 6
EVALUATION AND APPLICATION TO
SINGLES MINISTRY

In the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church in Riverside, California, there are an estimated 250 single people ages 30 years and above. Ten people participated in this study. After analysis of the data and responses, three broad themes emerged from the study. These include, but are not limited to these challenges:

There is negative perception of singleness in church and family.

Singles are striving to overcome life's challenges.

Singles in the church are searching for a ministry for themselves.

Negative Perceptions

It is the writer's view that certain scriptural expressions used in the past in certain scenarios may not be suitable in these changing times. Concepts like waiting upon the Lord should take a broader definition than the limited concept of praying until God answers your prayer for a mate. Waiting upon the Lord in spiritual matters means making a request to God to reveal and sharpen areas of giftedness, not waiting for a partner. However, if waiting for a partner becomes a desire or longing of paramount thought and focus, then it would be ideal to encourage such singles to courageously wait. Such waiting for a partner or

waiting for God to answer prayers like Santa Claus was discouraged in Proverbs 13:12 (NKJV): “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.”

There are singles who decidedly chose the way of “obedient singleness rather than accepting marriage from an unbeliever, thus inviting the church to look into the widening need of this class of worshipers” (Piper, 1991, p. 8).

Weising and Weising (1982) quote Frank Schneider on singleness:

For the first time in years of Christian service, we were aware of an affluence of intelligent, capable, loyal, energetic, talented single people who wanted someone to care ... Some lonely, some deeply hurt, others very self-sufficient and quite in control, but all desiring fellowship in a Christian atmosphere where they can feel they belong. (pp. 5, 6)

Schneider’s observation is an expression that mirrors the state of singles in many churches, especially in the cities and centers of higher education. The need for singles to feel welcome in service and also professionally utilized in their local church is strong, but from the questionnaire responses they do not feel welcome. While three of the 10 participants said that the church’s relationship with singles is good, seven of the 10 said it was either fair or poor. Whereas church leaders should educate their single population about dating values and pitfalls, pastors have to take the initiative of teaching their members that being single is not a sin. Single people are not second-rate members but are just as important as everyone else. One focus group member who is a former pastor realized this fact after he himself became single:

I’m a former pastor who, after my divorce, began looking for a church to attend and couldn’t believe how they all seemed targeted to married people and families. Instead of feeling uplifted at church, I felt lonely and disconnected. Then I thought back to my ministry days, and the realization I’d been similarly family-focused haunted me.

Scripture makes it clear that a person's marital status does not alter God's view of them. God loves his creation for its intrinsic worth, irrespective of its circumstances. "In the sight of God, all humans are equal. The distinctions of race, social status, and sex are of no significance to him (Gal 3:28)" (Erikson, as cited by Cresswell, p. 9). Likewise, "God calls his people to value all individuals equally, irrespective of their marital status" (Richardson, as cited in Cresswell, 2014, p. 15). Surely, this "realization may be more effective in persuading some congregations at least to look seriously at the possibility of a singles' ministry" (Johnson, as cited in Cresswell, 2014, p. 3). "Lack of ministry to single adults is a denial of service to a large and ever-growing segment of the population" (Collier-Slone, as cited in Cresswell, 2014, p. 2).

The church needs to employ a top-down approach to start breaking down the myths and unhelpful stereotypes, thus stabilizing a healthy view of singleness, nurturing good relations between married and singles, and enriching the lives of singles both within, and outside of the church. Singles' issues provide local congregations with exciting challenges and evangelistic opportunities. If a singles' ministry is embraced by a local congregation, not only will the lives of singles be enriched, but the lives of the married members will also be enhanced through the blessings of improved community and increased understanding and respect.

Local churches need to work at creating a welcoming environment for singles in which they can explore their full potential in Christ. Inclusive language and empowering words are needed to reinforce this ideology. Churches can start

by using a more inclusive approach in its language in sermons, verbal announcements, and bulletins. In addition, ministries such as Bible study groups, events, and seminars should include all groups. Alongside the use of the word “singles,” words like “Individuals committed to Christ” or “Christ’s partners for outreach” may be added to our lexicon of singles dictionary.

Although producing statistics to justify the need to pay attention to a phenomenon is an excellent thing to do, the true import of the lack of a structured ministry especially for singles, or denial of the needs of our fellow humans can only be felt within our human emotional level.

Overcoming Life’s Challenges

Single people face a number of challenges resulting from the loneliness of living without a partner. Every individual, whether married or single, faces emotional challenges, and at such times lonely people want someone who cares enough to recognize they exist. Franck (2017) has this to say about singles:

Most single adults feel like a fifth wheel in a class composed mainly of married adults. This leaves a single person feeling left out, misunderstood, and in some cases... Also, because of not having a spouse to provide encouragement and spiritual support, Christian singles may become undisciplined in their spiritual lives. (para. 5)

If we all face almost the same life challenges, would it not be better to mutually assist one another—being a brother’s keeper or at least avoid remarks and actions that question the whereabouts of one’s God?

Searching for a Singles’ Ministry

Singles are searching for a ministry for singles. There is a ministry for women, youth, and men. There should there be a separate ministry for singles.

However, from the questionnaire analysis, all of the participants agreed that the church needs to re-evaluate its relationship with singles.

According to Hsu (1998), “being a Christian is not an individual journey; it is a group effort lived in community” (p. 140). Where a group has peculiar needs, providing a place where such connection is made is not out of place. The need for never-married to feel connected is particularly important in urban churches where there is more likely to be a fragmentation of family network. Singles have special needs, not because the status of singlehood is bad, but because of neglect and misinformation of this dimension of human relationships.

In the study, seven of the 10 participants indicated that they would like to be part of a singles’ ministry. The three who disagreed gave a number of reasons they would not be part of the ministry, but the main reason was, “I don’t want to lose connection with other members of the church or my married peers.” Thus, a singles’ ministry apart from being fully integrated into the church would need to incorporate married people in some of their programs to bridge this concern.

On the other hand, on the need for acceptance and belonging, eight of the 10 participants revealed that they do feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in being single. Yet, they do not have a structured meeting agenda to identify and execute programs and events that address worship, spiritual, emotional, or social needs like the Adventist women’s, men’s and youth ministries often do.

Singles, like couples, come to church not only to share their unique spiritual gifts as individuals but also to be spiritually fed to relieve the emotional and spiritual challenges of life. The good news is that singles are bracing the

challenges of life and the limitations of the church to enhance their spirituality. This was revealed in the questionnaire. It was observed that seven of the 10 participants indicated that being single enhanced their spirituality. However, it was observed that when asked their opinion on their giftedness to serve God in singleness, only four of the 10 participants indicated they felt so gifted. In the view of the writer, this indicates a need for scriptural clarity pioneered by a singles' ministry.

Single persons are becoming a clearly distinct and growing body in the church community. Whether due to circumstances, choice, educational advancement, or service to Christ, it is still a matter for more study.

Some members in the church think that life does not start until one is married, or that one cannot really understand what love is because one is single and childless. If our identity is in Christ, why does a person's marital status matter so much? Why is it that the larger evangelical culture implicitly makes marriage and parenting such a cornerstone of adulthood and maturity? These notions go directly against the Christian faith, which teaches that God is the source of all love and that everyone—regardless of marital status! —can know that love. The church has become a family training center that pushes everyone who is not married to the margins. Being unwelcome to singles is contrary to the teachings of Christ, who called everyone to come and follow him. Some people have stopped attending church due to the perceived unfriendly environment towards them; however, some who do remain are held down by the admonition to “forsake not the assembling of brethren.” The apostle Paul—who was single and resolutely

committed to remaining so—speaks of the church *itself*, not marriage, as the means God uses to bring us to spiritual maturity (Eph 4:11-16). The church must be a means of healing and not hurting. It is expected to be a collective support system, where church worship itself serves as a social/spiritual experience during which persons from all levels of life unite to affirm their oneness and unity under their creator God. Let it be established in the church that the likes of apostle Paul can still be role models today.

Singleness as a Positive Option

God's primary purpose for all is that they be ambassadors in the spread of the good news of his kingdom. It is evident that singleness is rapidly emerging as a positive option to marriage. The purpose, therefore, of this study was to provide a model by which the church can better lead the way in assisting singles to live a fully empowered, joyous life for self, for their community, and for Christ in an era of post-modernity.

It has been reported that in the United States in the 1960s, about 70% of all women married before they were 24 years old. Marriages thereafter, began to face a downhill experience so much so that by 1971, by the time a woman turned 30, her chances of getting married had become very slim or even non-existent (Skoretz, 1971, para. 2). Some of the causative factors include wars that consume mostly men, and other social situations that cause the unavailability of men. The older the age group, the more common it is for females to outnumber males. Implementing a singles' ministry means working as hard as possible to reverse this imbalance, but also being prepared for it (Rhema, 2012).

Benefit of Singles' Ministry to the Entire Church

Singles differ in age, needs, lifestyle, mindset, fears, and passions. Each category has a special need for counseling and therapy from persons with adequate training and lived experiences. Furthermore, according to Wiginton's blog (2010), churches may have increased interest in reaching families and young adults in their congregation but have dramatically decreased their interest in single adults. Consequently, the trend is that single adult ministry is slowly dying nationwide. Thus, one can infer that the need for single adult ministry is overlooked in churches. Those with such ministries do not have a broad understanding of what the single adults need and how to minister to them.

The major benefit a singles' ministry will bring to the church is the destruction of un-healthy teachings and negative perceptions of singleness. The church will come to understand that singleness is a viable lifestyle and that God provides grace for living life as a Christian single adult. The singles' ministry might be a catalyst to set the church in line with Christian principles, and away from making idols of marriage, having children, and family.

The singles' ministry can function as an outreach arm of the church. It has been observed that life crises such as divorce, aging, job changes, empty nesting, financial changes, and grief often bring community members to the church. The church has the potential of attracting new disciples by meeting felt needs through programs that express love, compassion, acceptance, and Bible teaching. This often leads to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and involvement in other ministries. Singles ministries can have an active role in these programs.

Pastors and lay members must be sensitive to the special needs of each person in the congregation, but more so, the single adults. According to Hurst (2000), singles constitute the largest church segment that is unreached. The Seventh-day Adventist church's Single Adult Ministries Department is under the auspices of the Family Ministries Department. The department lumps together those who have never married and those who are single due to divorce, separation, and death of spouse, or other. Not so much is known about lives of single persons and how they should be ministered to (Barna, 2003).

There is an urgent need to create a church culture or environment that values singlehood. Currently society and the church in general seem to marginalize singles and elevate romantic and married relationships. The church needs to be counter-cultural by promoting the equality of singleness in word and action. It needs to provide a voice that many Christian singles, particularly younger ones, are longing to hear. It is important for a local church to know and understand its singles and seek to discover and help address the issues that are of particular concern to them, for instance, loneliness.

How to Get Started

The nature of singles' ministry is multifaceted. Single adult ministry is ministry to adults without a spouse, who are divorced, never married, or widowed. Singles include any adult over 18. Although age is not a defining factor, and interests, needs, and concerns vary, depending on the size of the church singles' ministry can become targeted according to any combination of age, need, or interest.

To be effective the singles' ministry needs to include a variety of ministries such as divorce recovery, grief recovery, single-parent family ministries, and remarriage preparation. The singles' ministry should not be a ministry that is totally separate from the other ministries of the church. In the same way that other ministries are included in the overall decision-making activities, the singles' ministry should have the same level of input. "One key to building a successful community of single adults in the church is balance – meeting the spiritual and social needs of singles, and promoting spiritual growth and relationships" (Rhema, 2012, para. 6).

An outreach-oriented singles group has to start with a core group committed to the ministry and to each other. Any singles' ministry—regardless of size—must be an active ministry. It must be kept new, small, close, and focused. The emphasis for small groups should be cultivating a place where people feel they belong.

In an interview, Rich Hurst (2000), director of singles' ministry resources for David C. Cook, was asked, "What is the best way to do single-adult ministry in the smaller church?" Hurst advised that a small church should begin with only one singles group, with the younger singles taking the lead. "If the 50-plus-year-old singles are the leaders," he said, "the 20-year-olds will not come." He continued:

Try to get the 20-year-olds to reach out to the 40- and 50-year-olds. Get them to do some things socially, and then give them opportunities to do things separately—a Sunday school class is a good way to start. Even in a church of 100 or 200, you may have 25 or 30 single adults; and at some point, you can have two classes of 15 each, one for the under 35 and one for the over 35. (para. 1)

According to Rhema (2012), singles must own the singles' ministry. They do not need programs to be done for them, especially not by couples in the church. They do not want to be treated like children or teenagers. Being adults, they can take responsibility for the programs themselves, making them effective, because they know what works for them. If married people are involved, they should be there only to work with them, not to run the programs.

In this study, I recruited an advisory group of seven singles to lead out in the implementation by planning the potlucks, determining subject matter for the seminars, and choosing the movies. Those who attended the potlucks included various categories of singles.

After the Singles Ministry has Begun

Once a group is formed, the direction it takes is up to the leader(s) and participants. No doubt some singles will attend singles group in hopes of finding a mate; but others may be perfectly satisfied being single, yet like to have an opportunity to discuss social and spiritual empowerment issues particular to their situation. And there are some singles who will avoid single groups like the plague, because that's not how they want to be defined.

Single persons' positive expressions of being single are impacted by their families' positive attitude towards singlehood. Thus, it is imperative that for a singles' ministry to be effectively developed it should find an activity that incorporates the role of family in enhancing total commitment to God. Here, the church becomes "family" because there are singles who have no biological family lines, but have adopted their church as "family."

Participation

Participation should be open to all church members who are never married, divorced, or widowed. Because singles are in different stages of life there is a sound reason to divide them by age and group. A possible division could be young singles, middle-aged singles, and singles approaching senior years. Mixing the older with the younger singles can be detrimental to growth, particularly in the younger demographic (30 years and above). The groups should allow for age overlap, however, and obviously, no one should make an issue of age. People need to feel comfortable with folks their own age, but different singles groups can get together for regular activities. Division should only be by age and not status, career, or education. Age divisions help people discover the right group for them and also guard against unhealthy relationships (Rhema, 2012).

Activities

To get the ministry started, the pastoral team or the singles leadership team will need to organize seminars relevant to single life. For singles in different stages of life and at different ages, the church must also provide special ministries, such as special small groups. The pastoral care team must not be limited to pastors but must include pastoral care chaplains. This is relevant because chaplains have specialized training to care for the whole being. Chaplains who received clinical pastoral education (CPE) are equipped to offer a

more thorough (holistic) approach to spiritual, emotional and mental health assessment of people.

The mission of single adult ministries is to encourage Christian single adults, and to prepare them to share the gospel by introducing others to Jesus Christ. One purpose of single adult ministries is to minister to the needs of single adults through divorce recovery, grief recovery, and single-parent family ministries. The participants in these ministries will be equipping themselves with skills for living productive lives, assisting other single adults during crises, and encouraging ministry to others through involvement in the local congregation. Singles ministries can implement service projects to the community and plan mission trips, thus integrating single adults into the church program by using their gifts, talents, and abilities.

Growing, healthy singles ministries are a combination of large events that attract significant numbers, and small groups that provide close-in sharing (Rhema, 2012). Choosing an activity that may primarily be attractive to singles, but is also open to married people can strengthen the bond between the groups by giving them a common goal. In other words, choosing an activity where marital status is superfluous allows them to infiltrate a non-Christian environment, with a common goal to be agents of Christ rather than being classified as an agent of Christ with a “married/single” tag.

Without the role of good friends, a church, despite its high spiritual emphasis, is dead. Apart from spiritual nourishment, a major reason people come to church is because they are looking for community. Thus, small groups or social

events are important in developing community in single adult ministry. Modern life and big cities have a way of making one anonymous. The church can fill this void by helping single adults to feel known in their church family. Because finding friends in church is important, friendship forming tools and culture need to be created. These tools will provide an opportunity to help singles and newcomers stay in church, giving the church an opportunity to help them in spiritual maturity.

Social events are excellent and nonthreatening for building community. They provide opportunity to include single adults who are not fully integrated into the life of the church. An atmosphere that includes food, games, and music allows participants to talk, laugh, and start forming friendships. Social events must also include a spiritual element that turns the focus of the attendees from themselves to Jesus Christ. This could be a testimony of a new Christian during potluck, a short devotional, or song(s).

Devotion and evangelism are opportunities for singles to get involved with church activities. For instance, a church could run an evangelistic seminar series centered on singleness and loneliness. Informal social activities can be incorporated among like-minded people at seminars. “Social connections often attract or maintain a person’s attendance at church even if they have no faith. A church that attracts singles because it meets their needs will be a growing church” (Johnson, as cited in Cresswell, 2014, p. 3).

Methods are many; principles are few. The principles remain constant, but the application is contextualized, adapting to the setting or need. This has made an

evangelism model useful in diverse settings, culturally and globally. Leading evangelism is complex because people are complex. But that complexity need not create inaction. It works best to let the singles be the primary determiners of the program. Singles programs can cover topics such as conferences, retreats, regular prayer meetings, and services that educate on topics like developing relationships, godly principles for dating, courtship, marriage, roles in the church, and spiritual growth.

Addressing Sexuality

In an interview, Ken Baugh (2000), director of Frontline, a young adult ministry of McLean Bible Church, was asked, “How are you addressing [sexuality] in your ministry?” Baugh states:

Sexual intimacy is natural human phenomenon which indicates that there is something deeper. A person is looking for a relationship—not just satisfying a drive or desire. We need to help young adults connect in healthy ways and let them know who they are in Christ without rejecting, condemning, or ridiculing them. We cannot condone sin, but we need to love and affirm one another. That does something to the heart.

I’m not saying that once we do affirm them, every single adult will stop having premarital sex. But the root issues are key. We must do more. We must tell them that premarital sex is sin, stop doing it. However, we will not motivate all singles to stop by simply shaming them. We must also help them understand and change their belief system. Help them understand why they are looking for sex. Let them know it’s a counterfeit, and it will not fill the void. Give them something to fill that void—a new relationship with Christ and healthy relationships with others. (paras. 1, 2)

In the same interview, Hurst (2000) states:

The church has traditionally addressed sexuality on a behavioral level. We’ve said, ‘This is what your sexual behavior should be; and if it’s not that, there are serious consequences.’ But we’ve missed an important point. We need to look at behaviors in terms of levels—the top level is our belief system, the next level is our thought processes about our belief system, the third level is our behavior about our belief system, and the fourth level is the consequences.

We must begin with a person's belief system. If a belief system teaches that God has a great plan for your life and part of that plan includes life-giving relationships, then single adults will see how their thought processes, behavior, and consequences should be in line with their belief system. The issue is not behavior; it is what single adults believe.

Helping singles learn healthy premarital relationships means there will be more sexual abstinence. If we create an environment where singles can be honest about their struggles—both with their successes and failures—and not be criticized for their honesty, then it will be easier for them to be open because they won't be crucified. James wrote about confessing your sins and restoring your brothers. The church seems to view premarital sex as the unpardonable sin. If the ultimate goal is restoration, then we need to create an environment where people can talk about their struggles. (paras. 3-5)

Single vs. Married

Many times, singles are presented as having a problem that needs to be fixed. Although married people can suffer from marital unfaithfulness and divorce, domestic abuse, and low marital satisfaction, singles do not organize themselves into groups, trying to solve or fix marriage problems. Likewise, married people should stop trying to fix the singles' "problem." Believing that the singles' problem needs to be solved is an implied belief in the inferiority of single people. Single people mature too, and marriage does not equate maturity. A part of the orientation that is needed is the understanding that married people do not deserve top positions or higher status in the church. It is only the headship of Jesus Christ that counts.

Many churches emphasize marriage and family so much that singles are left with the impression that to be a good Christian, one should be married and have children. They often feel as though they do not belong. It is important that pastors and ministers, when speaking from the pulpit, use inclusive language and not always refer to "your wife, your husband, or your kids." Doing so leaves a lot

of people out. If every bit of advertising for church events addresses families and couples, singles think these events are not for them. Churches that emphasize children and family tend to make singles feel out of place. Such classifications in churches are irritating to some, as they are a type of stigmatization (Rhema, 2012).

Married couples with children need and deserve support—but so do singles. Many times, singles are practicing celibacy in a culture that can hardly comprehend the concept. Some singles are also struggling with the fear that their desires for marriage and children might never be met. In the midst of trying to ward off loneliness and live healthy, good, responsible, and fulfilling lives, singles have to deal with the church's misconception of singles and sometimes with cruel remarks.

The prayer that should never cease from our lips is “Let thy kingdom come and let your will be done on earth.” Furthermore, if there is any burning passion a member should have, it should be the passion to see men and women, single and married, launching forward in an atmosphere that empowers one another, whether as individuals or in a group. The church's chief prayer for anyone should not be for “Mr. or Mrs. Right,” but for “right ministry.” The only right partner for any single person, if there should ever be one, is the partner from whom that person can draw support and spiritual strength. When praying for others, it is good to pray foremost that they will discover and/or nurture a personal relationship with Christ their Savior, so that more people will come to know Him through them. A significant concern when choosing a spouse is for discernment to

enable the individual to find one that can complement the spiritual shortcomings of the other for ministry.

Pastoral Care

The apostle Paul speaks of the church *itself*, not marriage, as the means God uses to bring an individual to spiritual maturity. In contrast, the church focuses on marriage as the institution that measures maturity to fully participate in Christian worship. So, without marriage, it might then be implied that unmarried Christians are just a bunch of permanent adolescents drifting aimlessly and hopelessly through life. The fact is marriage does not make one mature. Marriage is not the highest calling.

Since most pastors are married, singlehood is not always foremost in their minds. They may not readily understand the needs of single adults. But cultivating friendships with single adults will help pastors better understand life from a single's perspective. The church today has elders who are single. It is a good idea for the elder who assists the pastor to be a single adult. The phenomenon of single elders is the product of an accepted paradigm shift resulting from the church becoming a dynamic and changing entity. Pastors must be equipped on how to affirm single adults. Sermons should portray singlehood as a high calling, not a marital or life accident.

Implementation Summary

Forming a singles' ministry will help in orienting the church to the fact that singleness is not a victim state, singleness is not a lesser state, singleness is not a threatening state, but singleness is a growing state. Singleness is not going

away. Single adults go wherever they find a religious body that recognizes their needs—even if they have to go outside their own denomination (Collier-Slone, as cited in Cresswell, 2014, p. 2). A lot of Christians are simply confused. They have become so committed to the idea of a family-centered church that they are just not sure how to handle rising rates of singleness.

Perceptions that a singles' ministry will change for good cut across different persons, groups, and organizational forms. For instance, there are the pastors and ministers who fault the single men for not getting married even if they have tried, and there are members who think that singles are destined for some terrible fate. There are a lot of nice, well-intentioned Christian married people who say cruel, insensitive, or misguided things to and about single people. Some opine that some people remain single because they are not spiritual enough or that God is punishing them for something. Some think that when a person remains unmarried past a certain age, it might be attributed to social awkwardness. "Sure there are socially awkward singles, but there are plenty of socially awkward married people too" (Damiani, as cited by Brian Mavis, 2016). There are also those people who sometimes point out to the singles that there will be no one to look after them in their old age. Churches are so committed to the idea of nuclear or biological-family-centeredness that they are just not sure how to handle rising rates of singleness in the family of God.

As much as there is need for a singles' ministry, this does not imply that singles are a sub-culture; rather, just like the family life ministry and children and youth ministry, the singles' ministry should be a part of the church. Singles do not

want to feel they are an addendum to the church. One way to strengthen the values of singlehood is to place singles in positions of responsibility. Pastoral care can include any or all of these functions:

- giving talks about singleness;
- organizing or enabling social and fun activities;
- forming hospitality groups;
- providing models of singleness;
- praying personally or in the church for singles;
- including singles in all church activities;
- organizing or enabling singles groups;
- staying in contact through phone, email, or text;
- providing or facilitating practical help (when appropriate) in finding a partner;
- being informed of and recommending singles events;
- seeking viewpoints from singles.

Conclusions

Today, the church has a growing number of members with “non-traditional” family experiences. The singles referred to in this study are persons living alone or who have on their own formed personal households. In the Seventh-day Adventist church, singleness with special reference to the age group 30 years and above is recognized as a growing issue, but very serious steps are yet to be taken to teach/learn about singleness. Single persons come to the church for the same reasons married people do—to find release for whatever emotional or

spiritual baggage they are experiencing. There is no support ministry specific to singles in the church organization. Singles believe, and experts rightly acknowledge, that mingling in a community of like-mindedness will influence emotional health. In addition, singles on Adventist Online (2011) are saying that the church needs to address the issue of singleness within the Seventh-day Adventist church, and not remain silent and/or pretend that it does not exist. It is in response to this desire and my personal experience that I embarked upon this study.

Sexuality

Research has found through interviews with singles that most Seventh-day Adventist single persons do not believe that sexuality should be separated from morality. The emphasis of the Bible and the general Christian community is on the importance of sexual behavior and adjustment to a stable union. A core concern of singles is the possibility of maintaining their learned Adventist moral standards should a spouse come along. The anxiety of the young and single in the Seventh-day Adventist church, according to Skoretz (1971), includes questions like

Should the unattached person strive to find Seventh-day Adventist association when it is hard to be found? Should individuals resign themselves to loneliness? Should they maintain a social life by resorting to dates outside the church? Should they follow the teaching of the church in regard to sex and hopefully wait for sexual satisfaction sometime in the future?

As a regular worshipper and member of the health and single persons' ministry at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church, I have found there are an estimated 250 single people ages 30 years and above, and in spite of their

large numbers, singles do not have a visibly organized presence or regular activities (outside of occasional potlucks). These are questions that need to be pursued among Seventh-day Adventist singles.

Quality of Relationships

Though the majority of the participants have good quality contact and excellent contact with both members of the church and people outside the church, loneliness, stigmatization, isolation, unfriendliness, misconceptions of singleness, pressure to marry, and less attention when compared to married people with children are challenges singles face in differing degrees. Despite these challenges, most of the singles live productive lives, are happy, feel gifted to serve God in singleness, and experience enhanced spirituality. On the other hand, the majority of the singles in the study identified a need for the church to re-evaluate its relationship with singles. They are waiting for a structured and well-organized singles' ministry that will meet the needs of singles of all ages, choices, and passions.

Coping With Singleness

While the singles wait for a singles' ministry, the hope that one day the right person will come along remains a sustaining coping mechanism. Some people become single due to circumstances caused by pursuit of educational enhancement, having low self-esteem, aging, or engaging in service. The majority of singles are coping with the challenges of life by being involved in spirit-filled church activities and health-promoting leisure time activities. This is

even more noticeable in singles who have opted to dedicate their lives to God and believe that they are better able to serve God being single.

Availability for service might ward off negative feelings among singles and foster creativity because it encourages and allows active church outreach involvement. It is possible that if the single people in the church had a ministry, it would them keep busy with church related programs, thus, loneliness and life challenges would be given less attention.

In particular, outreach programs might appeal to this group. The nature of the outreach should be such that when the singles experience a demonstrable level of acceptance and inclusion in the church due to the influence of the established singles' ministry, they become ambassadors of change and outreach to their fellow singles in their immediate community. They would be able to feel a contagious sense of belonging, cognizant of the recognition and acceptance given by the church leadership about their maturity as men and women of integrity, because they are accepted as sexual beings who also need to be greeted with a holy kiss of acceptance in the household of faith. They would eagerly contribute their spiritual gifts to benefit the church in whatever capacity the Lord calls them to serve, including outreach programs.

The Way Forward—Model for Church Singles' Ministry

Based on the theme developed from the analysis, I developed a learning wheel (activity wheel model) as a recommendation for pastors, singles, and the church on how to begin to correct the anomaly as it relates to singles' ministry (see *Figure 8*). The proposed model illustrates the interconnection between the

single members in the church as a family and the services that could be available to them, because the family as an agent of religious socialization is a strong factor in developing the meaning of being single (Albrecht, as cited by Darrington, Piercy, & Niehuis, 2005). To understand the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of singles means expressing and practicing inclusion in language and action. Pastoral counseling will likely engender a closer emotional and spiritual relationship between church leadership and singles. Consequently, the church will experience devotion on the part of singles to participate and support the church's outreach ministries. Because they are valued singles will feel self-actualized in their spiritual family, and develop a sense of co-ownership of the work of the church. Singles' positive expressions of being single are impacted by their church family's positive attitude towards singlehood. Thus, it is imperative that a singles' ministry to be developed will find an activity to incorporate the encouragement of the church family in enhancing total commitment to God.

It is important for church and society to appreciate that God loves all regardless of gender, station, or status in life. In biblical stories, various people waited upon God for several years and finally God revealed himself to them in abundant ways. Sarah, Abraham, Joseph, Jacob, Hannah, Daniel, Mordecai, and Esther waited on God to liberate them from their various circumstances. Isaiah 40:31 says that those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength...mount up with wings just like eagles, and walk and not faint. For Sarah and Abraham, God gave them a child, even though both were long past the childbearing age.



Figure 8. Singles activity wheel as a model of church singles’ ministry.

Although all hope was lost for Sarah ever having a child, God rekindled her hope. Single people in church can pick up courage from the lives of biblical heroes as well as contemporary single achievers, refusing to give up, joyfully waiting on the Lord as an integral part of their service to God. Waiting on the Lord will ultimately bring singles to an insightful life and personal fulfillment whether or not they ever marry. It is time to educate singles to ask, “What can I do for my church; in what ways can I serve?” rather than “When will my church recognize me?” Church leadership must also become sensitive to the holistic needs of all members, especially the singles, who are vulnerable. The church is called to

organize its membership to worship God together, serving each other's needs regardless of social, marital, spiritual, or financial status in life. Just as the ten virgins waited in groups, the singles' ministry can provide a platform for singles to wait in groups for all their needs. What the church can do to serve the needs of singles is to convince them that they have a place where they belong—the church.

The purpose, therefore, of this study was to provide a model by which the church can better lead the way in assisting singles to live a fully empowered, joyous life for Christ and to avoid the idolization of marriage (Horst, 2001). I believe that inclusive language and empowering words need to come from the leadership to reinforce this ideology.

Singleness is to be seen as an image of beauty, inner courage, devotion, and determination to stand strong in a personal conviction. Regardless of cultural norms, practices, social values, or tastes, it is my view that a single person can afford to live, give, and do more by making the advancement of the cause of God a cherished service to pursue. Thus, hope in Jesus becomes the ideal hope—not hope in marriage.

APPENDIX A

MT. RUBIDOUX SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH AUTHORIZATION



September 28, 2015

Institutional Review Board
Andrews University
4150 Administrative Drive, Room 210
Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355

Researcher: Ekele Nwankwo

Title of the study: Singles Ministry at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church,
Riverside, California.

Institutional Consent to conduct a survey, seminar and focus group

This is to confirm that the Church Board of the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church has given consent for Ekele Nwankwo to conduct one or more seminars for singles, conduct a survey and hold focus group discussions to evaluate the seminars. The focus group discussion centers on the perceptions of Singles and Single's Ministry in MT Rubidoux SDA Church.

The Senior Pastor will be glad to provide any further information you might need and can be reached at (951) 276-8374.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael B. Kelly II".

Michael B. Kelly, II
Senior Pastor

5320 Victoria Ave., Riverside, CA 92506
(951) 276-8374 Office * (951) 274-2514 Fax
www.mtrubidoux.com

APPENDIX B

POTLUCK INVITATION

Bulletin announcement for participant recruitment IRB – 15 - 138

Attention all Single persons

A special potluck for all the single persons of Mt. Rubidoux church, men and women, will be held at the Maines Hall on October 11, 2015. A major agenda item will be the serving of a survey about Singles' ministry at this church. Ekele Nwankwo requests your kind attendance and voluntary participation at this potluck. This is part of her project in fulfilment of a D.Min degree at Andrews University. Please save this date. Thank you.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INVITATION

Focus Group Invitation IRB -15 – 138

You have been invited to take part in a focus group (small discussion group) **in the Maines hall at Mt Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church.** The meeting will be **for one hour with 6-8 other single** members of Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church and Ekele Nwankwo. The purpose is to share your honest perceptions about what would and what would not work in relation to singles' ministry in this church. Your perceptions will influence decisions regarding the function of the singles' ministry in this church. Please be assured that whatever you say including your participation in the focus group will remain confidential. You may also email me at ekelenwankwo@aol.com.

Check the appropriate date and time below and drop this paper into the box provided by your Sabbath School Class teacher or at another drop-box in the reception place.

I would like to participate in the focus group.

I am able to meet at any one of the following times: (Please check your preferred time)

Sunday, November 8, 1:00 PM

7:00 PM,

Tuesday, November 10, 4:00 PM

7:00 PM,

Wednesday, November 11, 1:00 PM

7:00 PM

Thursday, November 12, 1:00 PM

4:00 PM

I do not wish to participate in the focus group

Thank you for being a part of this discussion.

Sincerely,

Ekele Nwankwo

Meeting venue: The Maines Hall of Mt Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church

Times: As indicated above

Date(s): As indicated above

Duration: Forty five minutes to an hour

Attendees: Singles from Mt Rubidoux church

APPENDIX D
QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR SINGLES IN MT. RUBIDOUX CHURCH IRB -

15- 138

You are expected to go through each question/statement and respond with your honest opinion in the appropriate box. Please note that completion of this form is voluntary, must be anonymous and strictly confidential. The completion of this form implies an informed consent to participate in this survey.

1. Gender?

- M
- F

2. Age?

- Under 30
- 30 – 39
- 40- 49
- 50 – 59
- Over 69

3. Highest level of education attained?

- Less than High School
- High School/GED
- Some College
- 2-year College Degree
- 4-year College Degree Masters Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree (JD, MD)

4. Current work status?

- Student
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Full - time job
- Part - time job
- Retired
- On Disability

5. Respond to the following:

Question	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent
How single friendly is this church?	<input type="radio"/>				
Describe the quality of your contact with persons within the church	<input type="radio"/>				
Describe the quality of your contact with persons outside of the church	<input type="radio"/>				

6. Respond to the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Mt Rubidoux church needs to re-evaluate its relationship with single persons						
I experience social isolation						
I experience stigmatization						
I experience loneliness in church						
I experience pressure to marry from my family						
I experience pressure to marry from my married peers in this church						
I would like to be a part of the singles' ministry						
I feel gifted to serve God in singleness						
Children and families get more attention than single adults						
I feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in my singleness						
Being single has enhanced my spirituality						
I am happy being single						

7. Suggest what you would like to be done to improve Singles' ministry in this church

a. -----

b. -----

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Andrews University IRB -15- 138

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SEMINAR FOCUS GROUP AND SURVEY

This consent form is for a research activity that I am conducting as part of my degree project, in partial fulfillment for my requirement for the degree, Doctor of Ministry at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. A focus group of between six to nine singles will also be used. Your participation in this group is greatly appreciated.

Research Title: Singles' ministry at the Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church, Riverside, California.

Purpose of study: To carry out a survey, organize seminars and focus groups to evaluate the seminar and share perceptions which might influence decisions regarding the development and function of singles' ministry in Mt. Rubidoux Church.

Duration of participation in group: I understand that I will be required to participate in this discussion which will take approximately forty-five to sixty minutes of my time.

Benefits: I have been informed that there would be no direct benefit as a participant.

Risks: I have been informed that there are no risk(s) involved with my participation in this group.

Voluntary Participation: I have been informed that my participation in this group is completely voluntary. I am aware that there will be no penalty or loss of benefits I'm entitled to if I decide to cancel my participation in this group. And that there will be no cost to me for participating in this focus group, neither will there be any remuneration.

Confidentiality: All responses will be strictly confidential. I understand that my identity in this focus group will not be disclosed in any published document. And that the researcher will keep the records in a password protected computer.

Contact: I am aware that I can contact the supervisor of the project,

Dr. Johnny Ramirez-Johnson

ramirez-johnson@fuller.edu

Tel. + 1 626.584.5539 or - Ekele Nwankwo - ekelenwankwo@aol.com Tel. 718-506-8932 for answers to questions related to this study. I can also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University at (269) 471-6361 or irb@andrews.edu.

I have read the contents of this Consent and received verbal explanations to questions I had. My questions concerning this focus group have been answered satisfactorily. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this group. I am fully aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact Ekele Nwankwo, or advisor.

Signature(Subject)Date

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

LIST OF FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS **IRB 15 - 138**

The meeting began with a quick round of personal introductions, starting with myself and going around the room. All were seated in a circular form.

Exploring the group

What arguments or considerations do you have for being single?

What thoughts, feelings or beliefs do you have against being single?

Engaging the group

In what way(s) have being part of the singles' ministry group helped you to achieve your life's goals?

In what way(s) if any, have members of the opposite sex contributed to your singleness?

Ending the group

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your perceptions about singleness?

About singles' ministry in Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church?

In terms of felt needs, how would you shape the singles' ministry of this church for the future?

SUPPORTIVE MATERIAL

CHMN 787 Theory and Research in Chaplaincy

Module (or Course) Description

This module covers instruction in theory and research skills within the context of spiritual care in the chaplaincy setting. It provides education in the following specialty areas: practical theology, qualitative research, cultural psychology and theology.

The course is prepared especially for chaplains of hospital, community, and healthcare organizations. Each course participant will integrate essential research skills and approaches into their context of healthcare practice and demonstrate competencies in a portfolio of experiences. Participants will share accountability for their development in peer groups that meet outside of the two-week intensive. Participants in the healthcare chaplaincy cohort take the following modules as part of a sequence of CHMN 786, GSEM 730, GSEM 706, GSEM790, CHMN 787 (February 20-28, 2011), GSEM 796, CHMN788 and GSEM 796 to form a healthcare chaplaincy concentration.

Concentration/Outcomes / Program Competencies.

The Doctor of Ministry program seeks to develop the person, knowledge, and practice of its students. While the program is structured around certain areas of concentration, there are competencies we feel are important to evaluate as outcomes for all students.

The following are those program competencies.

Being:

Self-reflection: to help participants become aware of their strengths and limitations (background, emotional state) and to realize the impact self-awareness and self-understanding may have on ministry.

Knowing:

Academic: to help participants acquire knowledge of current issues and research related to the field of spirituality and health, engage the discipline through sociological and psychological perspectives, reflect theologically on the lived experience of patients, and learn basic research skills relating to the field of healthcare.

Professional: to help participants gain knowledge of the professional field including spiritual leadership, consultation, networking, and ethical conduct.

Doing:

Clinical: to help participants acquire clinical skills pertinent to their practice in the field of chaplaincy and spiritual care within the context of healthcare.

Spiritual and Theological Formation: to help participants integrate their spiritual and theological perspectives into the practice of ministry.

IRB 15 - 138

Nwankwo Protocol

1. Title and Purpose of the Study:

“Singles’ ministry at Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church, Riverside California”.

The purpose is to develop, implement and evaluate a support program that will serve the unique needs of singles, 30 years and over, who show positive interest in participating in singles’ ministry group in this church. The study will also find out what impact the singles’ ministry had on the church and how to shape the ministry in the future.

2. The Subjects:

Those who will be involved in this project are single church members, 30 years old and above. They are chosen because they are directly related to the problem being studied. There are no vulnerable populations targeted.

3. Recruiting:

The subject will be briefed about the project and recruited during a potluck event for all single members of the church. The purpose of the study will be explained before serving the survey instrument. I will explain that there is no compulsion or pressure to participate.

4. Consent:

On the survey is indicated that completion of the form, implies an informed consent to participate in the study.

5. Voluntary Participation:

See survey instrument of Appendix C

6. Procedures:

The main activities of this project will be to present 2-3 seminars focusing on the issue of ‘Church life’ as single persons – how single people can live to reach their full potential, emotionally, socially and spiritually. This will be made effective through a 5-7 member leadership team. Ministry events will be in-reach among singles and out-each in the community. All meetings will be held during potlucks. A focus group will be used to determine what was learned by this ministry and its implementation at this particular church.

No risk is envisaged to the participants in this study. The survey instrument is presented as voluntary and anonymous. Only the principal investigator will have access to the data. There is no concealment or deception.

7. Data Collecting:

The type of data to be collected will come from surveys. The surveys will be enveloped and administered to single church members at a potluck towards the end of October, 2015 (those who indicate interest to participate in a singles’ ministry group). The data will be collected same day if possible and at different times within 1-2 weeks of administering it. People will be given the option to drop the completed survey in a (physical) drop-box provided at the church reception section or hand-delivered through the office of the church secretary to leave room for anonymity. No recordings of any kind will be used.

Securing of Data

The data will be anonymous and yet confidential. No names will be written on completed surveys. To further secure and maintain confidentiality, each survey paper will be served and returned in an envelope addressed to the

investigator but without the name or address of the participant. Participants will be informed that they are free to return the envelopes through the office of the church secretary or into the drop-box provided at the church reception. Use of black pens will be emphasized for uniformity and thus reduce the risk of personal identity. The data will be secured on a password protected computer.

Focus group

The focus group participants will be singles from the church. They will be invited through the Sabbath school classes. The invitation reads as follows:

Focus Group Invitation

You have been invited to take part in a focus group (small discussion group) **in the Maines hall at Mt Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church.** The meeting will be **for one hour with 6-8 other single** members of Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church and Ekele Nwankwo. The purpose is to share your honest perceptions about what would and what would not work in relation to singles' ministry in this church. Your perceptions will influence decisions regarding the function of the singles' ministry in this church. Please be assured that whatever you say including your participation in the focus group will remain confidential. You may also email me at ekelenwankwo@aol.com.

Check the appropriate date and time below and drop this paper into the box provided by your Sabbath School Class teacher or at another drop-box in the reception place.

I would like to participate in the focus group.

I am able to meet at any one of the following times: (Please check your preferred time)

- Sunday**, November 8, 1:00 PM
- 7:00 PM,
- Tuesday**, November 10, 4:00 PM
- 7:00 PM,
- Wednesday**, November 11, 1:00 PM
- 7:00 PM
- Thursday**, November 12, 1:00 PM
- 4:00 PM
- I do not wish to participate in the focus group

Thank you for being a part of this discussion.

Sincerely,

Ekele Nwankwo

Meeting venue: The Maines Hall of Mt Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist church

Times: As indicated above

Date(s): As indicated above

Duration: Forty five minutes to an hour

Attendees: Singles from Mt Rubidoux church

I will use the services of Sabbath School teachers to distribute the invitation to the focus group meeting so as to reach as many singles as possible.

The invitation will be given to the teachers to distribute and have the papers dropped back into a drop-box that will be provided at the class and also at the church welcome/ reception center.

At the beginning of the meeting, each attendant will sign in. I will introduce the purpose of the study and focus group. I will read to them the issues relating to their participation. They will be informed about the voluntariness, confidentiality of their participation and freedom to express their perception of singles and such a ministry in Mt Rubidoux church.

I will lead in the discussions, using exploratory, engagement and exit questions to ensure adequate participation and understanding of the study focus. I will be recording (hand writing) the key points of the responses. Same routine will be followed for each day.

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Ekele Nwankwo** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 06/23/2015

Certification Number: 1787192

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VITA

Name: Ekele Ukegbu-Nwankwo

Place of birth: Aba, Nigeria. I was Born on April 14, 1955 to Mr Jacob O. and Agnes. C. Ukegbu (both now Deceased). My father was the first indigenous Manager of Seventh-day Adventist Schools from the 1950's till the late 1960's in the then Eastern Region of Nigeria. I am the 6th of 10 children, all raised in a Seventh-day Adventist Family and are still in the faith. Like my siblings, I received Adventist Education from Primary and all along the lines. I was baptized into the faith in 1971 at Forsyth Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church, the College Church, soon after the commencement of my High School Education. The then Ihie High School, was one of the premier Seventh-day Adventist schools in Nigeria.

My Family:

I was married to Joel Nwankwo from 1981 till 2009. The Children from my marriage are three girls and one boy. They are:
Ihuoma, RN, M.SC (Global Health); Ogechi, RN; Enyioma, Pharm D. and Chinagozi, FSET Engineering Technology

Education:

2012 – 2014 – Doctor of Naturopathy in Original Medicine (ND) from the International Institute of Original Medicine

2005 – 2009 – Board Certified Chaplain by the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC)

2001 – 2005 – MDiv, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University

1989 – 1990 – Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) from University of Port-Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria

1974 – 1978 – Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration/Secretarial Studies Minor From Andrews University (Then Adventist College of West Africa – Now Babcock University, Nigeria.)

Ordination:

2006 Commissioned Minister License in the Seventh-day Adventist Gospel

Ministry by the Florida Conference

Experience:

- 2017 – Private Lifestyle Consultancy services
- 2013 – Private Lifestyle Consultancy services;
Personal Ministries Leader – Heritage Seventh-day Adventist Church,
NY
- 2010 – 2012 – Literature Evangelism; Volunteer Chaplain, Peninsular Hospital Center,
Far Rockaway, Queens, NY
- 2008 – 2009 – Bible Worker – Palm Coast Seventh-day Adventist Church, Florida
- 2006 – 2008 – Staff Chaplain – Florida Hospital System, Ormond Beach, Florida
- 2005 – 2006 – Resident Chaplain – Kettering Medical Center, Ohio
- 1996 – 2001 – Faculty Administrative Officer – Babcock University, Niger

