

Ministry with Single Adults

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Introduction

A large population of single adults ranging in age from 18-35 can be found in all resort areas—from the beaches of Hawaii and Florida to the mountains of California, Colorado, and Tennessee. The reasons they come are as varied as their own personal backgrounds. Yet, one thing they seek, whether it be for a few months or a few years, is to play and have fun.

It is to this population that the churches of resort areas must learn to seek and to minister. Therefore, it is vital that we come to understand the single adult—their needs, their joys, their hopes, and their fears. We must have a good understanding of these things in order to minister to them while they are among us. The resort area provides exciting opportunities to minister if churches are willing to lay aside some traditional views of ministry to reach out to this population. To do this we need to learn about (1) the single adult, (2) the resort area, and (3) developing a theological basis for ministry.

The Single Adult

- Out on their own at last! Out of school—temporarily or forever!
- Away from supervision: parental, community, and church.
- Free to play and to have fun before facing the realities of work, family, or completing an education.
- Fun can be in:
 - activities—skiing, hiking, et cetera.
 - social—parties, bars, and so forth.
 - relationships—friends, living together
 - chemical substances—drugs and alcohol.

In other words, fun as in a “go for it” attitude.

- Singles attract singles.

Resort Areas

- Resort areas are transient. Lisa Robertson of Squaw Valley USA says, “Of the 1,028 employees we had last year, approximately 85 percent of them were single. Of this 85 percent, only 20 percent returned to work at Squaw the following year.”
- There are no rigid social morals in a resort area. There is an open value system.
- Weekend, holiday, swing, and graveyard shifts are common employment practices. Work is seasonal with little or no benefits. Ski areas pay poorly, but give their staff free ski passes. In general, there is a low pay scale at resort areas. The exceptions to this would be casino employees, cocktail waitresses, and waiters and waitresses at plush restaurants.

- Housing is easily arranged, but quite expensive. This forces young adults to get together and rent condominiums.
- Resort areas often are 24-hour a day communities.
- People come to resort areas to try to live out their fantasies. It is a fantasy to live at Tahoe or Maui. The attitude is: “I can do whatever I want.” Everybody needs to live out their fantasies. However, there are dangers as well as joys in this. The resort area buys into this and tries to provide the fantasy. “Fantasy Island” is alive and well. The dream is more fun than the reality. However, this kind of dream lasts for about one season and most move on somewhere else in search of Paradise.

Ministry to Single Adults

There is a strain of Christian theology that is especially held to in the United States that has its origins and applications in a strong work ethic. That is, if you love God and work hard, you are an okay person. Unfortunately, this theology also teaches that if you love God and don't work hard, your faith may not be very secure.

No wonder the single adult doesn't feel comfortable in churches that hold to or practice this theology. The single adult and the church need to realize that we are truly saved by faith and not by our works. As the church in a resort area develops a more relaxed atmosphere, it will become more acceptable to the single adult. It is out of this acceptance that the first seeds of ministry can be planted.

Two key attitudes needed for an effective ministry with single adults in a resort area are:

- A conservative theology combined with a relaxed atmosphere. You do not have to compromise your theology to minister in a resort area. As a matter of fact, a firm and stable theology attracts single people.
- Stability in the midst of constant change. We have found that the single adult who flees all structure and traditional values is also seeking some of the stability they tried to escape. The church can provide this stability. The gospel is the foundation, the rock, and the anchor.

Ways to Minister in a Resort Area

- Outdoor worship services—in ski areas, on beaches, in parks, on the water.
- Weekday Bible studies.
- Integrate singles into the church as whole persons and as part of the church. Mix single adults with married adults and older adults in Bible studies.
- Be flexible. This is a must if you are in a 24-hour community and a community that works weekends and holidays.
- Discipleship—one-on-one.
- Potluck meals—families and singles get together and fellowship occurs.
- Campgrounds—campfire programs.

- Beach ministry.
- Singles groups.
- Divorce recovery.
- Good music in your worship service attracts singles. Also, special musical concerts will attract singles.
- Informal fellowships—singles going to brunch after morning worship service, trips to mission conferences, et cetera.

Adapted from an article by Debbie Wohler in the 1993 *National Resort Ministries Conference Notebook*. Used by permission.