

The Intimate Relations of Single Mission Workers

Things mission agencies can do nurture healthy single mission workers

- Don't use the word 'family' indiscriminately, as in "We are a family church" or "We want to attract more families". While church should be family in the widest possible sense (Luke 8:21), using the word too loosely can repel those who are not a happy part of a nuclear family. It is good to affirm and nurture families, but in doing take care so not to denigrate the rest of the church. Even referring to the agency as a family may be problematic.
- Promote discipleship. The closer we all grow to God, the more we realise that our real fulfilment is found in loving and serving God, and not in finding the right partner.
- Don't expect marriage to be the answer to every problem that single people have. It isn't the answer to the problems of married people!
- Be careful not to marginalise single people so that they are kept on the fringes of the community. They have as much right to belong as everyone else. Affirming them creates an environment in which all people can be valued.
- Don't assume that single people are lonely and unfulfilled until they 'settle down'. Many of them have a vibrant relationship with God, a fulfilling career and ministry, a good social life and they are very happy in their singleness (Matthew 19:12).
- Pray that single people might be fulfilled in their singleness. We frequently pray for God's blessing on couples and families, so why leave out the singles?
- Talk about *enriching* singleness, not *coping* with it.
- Don't matchmake without permission. It can just reinforce a single person's sense of lack or inadequacy. While matchmaking can be done out of care and compassion, it can communicate that you assume there is a deficiency in the life of a single person.
- Be careful about the language you use. Much of what is said intending to encourage singles can actually do the opposite. For example 'God is teaching you something first' is not encouraging. The single person doesn't know what he has to learn, or how. It also inadvertently implies that marriage is a reward for spiritual growth.
- Foster a caring, sharing community in which all people can develop meaningful relationships with others and nobody feels left out or uninvolved. Encourage people to look out for one another's needs (Philippians 2:4).
- Organise special teaching seminars at your conferences.
- Make resources available, particular training materials or conferences.
- At significant seasonal events (e.g. Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving) and on Sunday lunchtimes, encourage the community to open its doors to others rather than exclude singles. Single people often find it really hard to go home after the joy of church fellowship to eat a sandwich by themselves.
- Welcome single people into leadership. Because singles are often thoughtlessly lumped in together with young people due to their assumed 'interim' state, their giftings and abilities can be overlooked and they are often used simply as drones who are there to provide a labour force.