

SECTION A

Introduction

Definition of terms and methodology

The aim of this thesis is to help Christian churches within Australia, notably Baptist churches in Sydney, to lead the way in assisting singles, particularly never-married women without children, to live fully empowered, joyous lives for Christ. 'Singles are adults who, for whatever reason, are not now living in a committed relationship with another adult' (Landgraf 1982, 1).

The fact that Australia has an increasingly 'single' population indicates that the need for an effective ministry to this target group should be of significant interest to the church. In Australia, '[p]eople living alone are the fastest growing social group, now accounting for one in four households' (Medibank Private 2002, 17). In general, the church has tended to focus on the importance of families, rather than singles. 'Lack of ministry to single adults is denial of a large and ever-growing segment of the population' (Collier-Slone 1993, 12).

Collier-Slone (1993, 9) highlights the fact that,

Never-married singles have their own painful issues and do experience feelings of alienation, loneliness, and marginalization. They are often less understood than any category of single persons because they are perceived as not having followed the accepted "norm" of marriage, and they are not parents; in short, neither church nor society knows what to do with or for them.

In order to contemplate this topic within the assigned word constraints I have used a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative research. For my quantitative research I employed the use of questionnaires which were distributed to never-married women within Baptist churches in Sydney (see *Section B*). The analysis of the questionnaire results (see *Chapter 6*) has influenced the direction and content of this thesis.

When referring to one or more people from the questionnaire sample group I employ the term, 'questionnaire respondent/s.' I use the term, 'the church' to refer to the Universal church. My qualitative research focuses on a variety of literature primarily from America, Britain and Australia.

Why this topic?

As a never-married person I have, at times, been hurt by the church's insensitive emphasis on family combined with my desire to be married with my own family. Although I have worked through personal issues in this area, I am often saddened and frustrated when I see other singles struggling. I believe that the church can do a better job of pastorally caring for singles. Clarkson (1979, 15) notes,

Singles have many griefs and problems neither recognized nor understood by the rest of the world. Many of us feel very much alone and overlooked in our churches, our needs for love and fellowship are largely ignored.

A number of questionnaire respondents commented on feeling inferior to married people in their church. For instance, one lady considered one of the most significant struggles for single Christian women today is, 'being made to feel they have been "left on the shelf" and that single is "second best"' (ID 2145/1, Appendix F).

The church is slowly realising that the increasingly single population, found in the world today, requires a more enriching ministry. Since the 1970's there has been a steady increase in literature concerning the enrichment of a single person's life and how the church can help. In spite of this, it remains an area that has been explored in a limited manner, with the bulk of literature coming from America and Britain. 'We believe that singleness is a valid lifestyle and that comprehensive research about today's Christian singles is missing from contemporary literature' (Koons & Anthony 1991, 17 – 18). There is certainly a need for a larger contribution from Australia, and in particular, written to Australians.

Levels of singleness in our churches today

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, November 2002), the number of single adults who will never marry is increasing. The 2001 Census revealed that approximately thirty-one percent of the Australian population aged 15 years and over had never-married. It further revealed that the 'single' population of Australia, due to a person being never-married, separated, divorced, or widowed, was approximately forty-eight percent. Therefore, in Australia '...there are more single adults than married couples' (Sturt 1996, 154).

According to the most recent National Church Life Survey (2001) results, approximately sixty-one percent of the respondents were female. Reportedly, thirty-two percent or approximately

one third, of all of those who responded to the survey (over age 15) were single. Of this thirty-two percent, seventeen percent had never been married. Although statistics reveal the need for a ministry to singles, ‘...an awareness of human needs may be more effective in persuading some congregations at least to look seriously at the possibility of a single ministry’ (Johnson 1982, 15).

Direction of thesis

Currently the church can seem to re-enforce ideas that never-married women may find oppressive rather than acting as God’s agent in helping them to live fully empowered, joyous lives for Christ. For this reason, *Section A* of this thesis will explore some ideas that can contribute to a never-married woman’s struggle with her singleness. The theory of *Section A* combined with the quantitative research found in *Section B* provides a foundation upon which *Section C* builds in order to consider ways forward for the church in Australia with regards to ministries to singles, and in particular, never-married women.

Chapter 1

Never-Married Women Frustrated by Unrealistic Expectations

Looking for 'Mr Right'

Some never-married women may struggle with their singleness because they have grown up with the idea that their life is partially on hold until they find, 'Mr Right.' This can be reinforced by well-meaning members of the church who suggest to never-marrieds that, 'the right one will come along soon/ in God's timing.' This seems to rarely be a helpful concept to either maintain or reinforce.

The writer does not believe that there is only 'one person' out there for each of us. Such a belief can cause women to be excessively hopeful that the 'one person' will eventually come along, they will marry and live 'happily ever after'. This is unrealistic. Over time, it can lead some never-married women to despair that their 'one' person is somehow lost. They may start to wonder what they are doing wrong and why their 'Mr Right' has not yet found them.

Alternatively, single women can become so paranoid that a person they are dating is not 'the one' that they do not marry anyone. Richardson (2001, 2) notes,

Waiting on God for the perfect person and the attitude that marriage is God's perfect will is often proclaimed from the pulpits today, laying on tremendous guilt while impacting the self-esteem of thousands of single Christian men and women.

The concept of one perfect 'Mr Right' is, in the main, an antiquated, unhelpful, pagan ideal. 'While many Christian singles believe in the dream of the perfect partner, most don't realize that this concept comes not from the Bible but from Greek philosophy' (Hsu 1998, 76). Nowhere in Scripture does it indicate that there is 'one person' for each of us to marry. In the Old Testament, many men had multiple wives. For instance, Esau (Gen 28:9), King David (1 Sam 25:42-43), Jacob (Gen 31:17) and Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-8). Was one of these women 'the one' for her husband, with the extra wives being extraneous? Possibly, but the writer does not think so.

Scripture provides guidelines for marriage. For instance, we should marry a person of the opposite sex - Leviticus 18:22 describes homosexual activity as an abomination to the Lord. It is best to marry a believer - the Israelites were repetitively warned not to marry outside of their

race. See for instance, Deuteronomy 7:3. 1 Corinthians 6:14 speaks of the importance of not being '...mismatched with unbelievers'.

Since we have been given free will, provided we are not making a decision of which any part contradicts Scripture, we are free to marry whomever we choose. Once we have made that decision, we need to accept that the person we have chosen has become 'the one' for us as a result of free choice and the legal act of marriage, unless there are extenuating circumstances like adultery or abuse.

Chapter 2

Some Further Theological Perspectives That May Frustrate Never-Married Women

The place of prayer

Some people have a seemingly works based theology that encourages them to think that the guarantee of a spouse results from an individual's level of faith and amount of prayer. Some passages of Scripture, such as Jesus' parable of the need for perseverance in prayer (Luke 11:5-13), are believed to imply that you will get what you ask for provided you ask for it enough times. However, irrespective of frequency, God is not a magician who grants people their wishes upon request. '...God is not a sugar-daddy giving his children everything they want exactly when they want it' (Huggett 1985, 75). Surely there would be no war, no poverty, no abuse and no unwanted singleness in this world if God was in the business of automatically granting us what we want.

Other passages of scripture such as Matthew 21:22 are sometimes used to say that a person will be granted whatever they ask for in prayer, provided they have enough faith. Such a theology can cause people who have been desperately praying for a husband over a prolonged period of time to become deeply discouraged. Never-married people can sometimes wonder whether they have not asked enough times, in the right way and/ or with an acceptable amount of faith. Hagner (1995, 606) notes that the intention of Matthew 21:22 '...is to limit the granting of requests to the will of God.' It is not to encourage people to believe that they will get what they want provided they ask for it in the right way.

God's will

God's will is primarily that the news of his kingdom is spread so that more people will come to know Christ as their saviour. If prayer requests are to be in line with God's will, then they should predominantly be 'kingdom advancing' requests. That is why, for instance, when praying for others, it is good to pray foremost that they will either discover and/ or nurture a personal relationship with Christ their saviour.

When the writer prays concerning her future husband she asks that if her ministry would be enhanced by being married, and similarly that her future husband's ministry would be enhanced through marriage to her, that God will provide her with a husband. If however, the writer's ministry would be more kingdom advancing if she were to remain single, she asks that God would remove her desire to be married and ensure that she fulfil his will as a single person. The writer was recently encouraged to read of another woman who shared her philosophy. Whelchel (2001, 52) wrote that she would only be interested in marrying a man '...who would enhance [her] walk with God and allow [them] to have a more effective ministry together than [they] have separately'. Such an attitude is conducive to increasing peace, determination and excitement about an individual's life and ministry. The writer's desire is to see all single Christian women experience increasing peace, determination and excitement about their lives and ministry. Additionally, we need to reach out to the community and win singles for Christ (see 'Evangelistic Opportunity' in chapter 9).

The purpose, therefore, of this thesis is not to provide false hopes of the provision of husbands for all who desire them. Nor is it to outline the way in which someone would best receive a husband. Rather it is to help the church to lead the way in assisting singles to live a fully empowered, joyous life for Christ.

The human condition

Unfortunately, we live in a broken world that is rife with sin. In this world it is not appropriate to believe that everything comes from God. Clarkson (1979, 15) comments,

I may not blame my singleness on God. Singleness, like... suffering, death, and all else that is less than perfect in this world, was not in God's original plan for his creation. It is one of the many results of man's fall. All of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, must partake of the evils attendant upon man's sin. It is not ours to choose our portion. Singleness is a part of my share.

There is an element of truth in Clarkson's comment. Everyone's life is strangled by the consequences of both their own sin, and the sins of those around them. The Christian faith frees people from the eternal consequences of their sins, but they are not always removed from the effects of sin. Christians are empowered to survive and rise above sin, but not to eradicate it totally. One of the many consequences of sin in the world is a struggle that many people have to deeply connect with and commit to each other. Ironically, many people fear the very thing that they crave. This can result in broken relationships and broken community.

A problem with Clarkson's comment is that it implies that God's original plan was for everyone to be married – additionally, it can be interpreted to align being single with suffering and death! One '...misconception implies that although Adam was created in God's image, he was somehow deficient until Eve was created for him. It might even suggest that Jesus was incomplete, since he was single' (Koons & Anthony 1991, 72)! God intends that everyone should be in community, not that they should necessarily be married. People need to be '...in relationship with each other. This is God's intention. One of these relationships is marriage' (Payne 1994, 117). Ultimately, individuals need a relationship with God in order to be complete, not another broken person.

Biblical view of singleness

In Scripture, '...the single life is honored and commended through both personal example and teaching' (Erikson 1999, 574). For instance, Paul wished that all people were single as he was (1 Corinthians 7:8) and wrote of the advantage in ministry that a single woman has over a married woman (1 Corinthians 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 1991, 76). These include, Ruth, Elijah, Daniel, Jesus and Paul.

However, some believe that the Bible favours marriage above singleness. For instance, Landgraf (1982, 23 – 24) writes that Scripture is

...basically patriarchal and tribal, with marriage and family regarded as normative.... When nonmarriage is mentioned or implied, it appears as an aberration connected with some special purpose, such as a dangerous or all-encompassing calling like that of Jesus.

The writer considers Landgraf's view to be rather extreme, instead she believes that singleness is more positively presented in Scripture (as highlighted above).

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[atians] 3:28)' (Erikson 1999, 575). Likewise, God calls his people to value all individuals equally, irrespective of their marital status (Richardson 2001, 3). 'Christians should show the

same impartial interest in and concern for all humans, regardless of the incidentals of their lives (James 2:9)' (Erikson 1999, 575).

Chapter 3

Singleness and Sexuality

Society's impact on singleness

From a young age, girls are encouraged to consider marriage the norm. For instance, they grow up hearing stories such as, 'Cinderella' which encourage the child to consider finding a prince and marrying him to be their main aim in life.

Our culture's expectations about marriage invariably translate into a kind of prejudice against singles. For example, if marriage is a sign of maturity, respectability, and success, then being single suggests you are immature, reckless, and a failure (Xavier & Kiersky 1999, 7).

Stories about girls who grow up to become joyfully successful women are rare. Instead Western society promotes romantic relationships.

Society seems to advocate that it is good to be single, provided you have a 'significant other.' This message can affect a never-married woman's level of contentment with her singleness. Although question four of Part B of the writer's questionnaire did not list 'society' as a possible source of pressure to be married (see Appendix B), a few respondents noted its impact. For instance, one lady wrote, 'I don't necessarily feel "pressured" but the fact that I want to be married assumes pressure from somewhere - perhaps "society" is the source' (ID 2065/1, Appendix H). "Single people persist in telling themselves that the real way to live is, of course, in a relationship – preferably a marriage relationship, but at least in some kind of committed relationship' (Landgraf 1982, 22).

We live in a world that seems to be made for twos – sixty percent of the respondents to the questionnaire (see *Chapter 6*) identified this form of societal pressure as being a significant struggle for single Christian women. 'Although statistics tell us there are more single adults than married adults, everything around us is designed for couples' (Whelchel 2001, 22).

Society seems to punish people who are not in a relationship in various ways.

...[M]ost societies provide structural supports and sanctions for married couples, and the single individual faces numerous barriers in a society based on the

assumption that most adults are single only for a temporary period prior to or in between marriages (Staples 1982, 13).

For instance, there are financial ‘punishments’ placed upon single people when travelling. It is much more expensive to travel alone than it is to travel with someone. Britton (1982, 57) observes that single women experience ‘... social disadvantages ...in their upbringing, employment, leisure, personal relationships and life in the church....’

Singleness and sexuality

No one is devoid of sexuality, it is part of our identity. ‘...[T]he only persons with no sexual feelings are the very old, the very ill – or the very dead’ (Foyle 1985, 139)! Forty percent of the questionnaire respondents (see *Chapter 6*) considered issues pertaining to sexuality to be a significant struggle for singles. Society implies that the only healthy way for an individual to express their sexuality is by being sexually active. Since the sexual revolution of the 1960’s, there has been an increasing societal pressure on individuals to be sexually active irrespective of their marital status. If a person is not sexually active, then they are not considered to be normal by society’s standards. ‘Virginity now carries the social stigma that adultery and premarital sex once had. Christians are not immune to this climate of thought’ (Hsu 1998, 19).

Many, particularly singles, struggle with expressing their sexuality in a healthy way. ‘Singleness is no safeguard against impurity – in every heart, purity requires constant watchfulness, a daily fight against the flesh, and a firm attitude against sin’ (Arnold 1996, 18). Yet the church seems to have little to say about healthy expression of a single person’s sexuality, other than perhaps implying that it should be suppressed. ‘Suppression can lead only to bitterness or sexual perversion...’ (Yuill 1995, 125). Therefore, from a very young age, the most reasonable voice that people hear regarding expression of sexuality comes from society. The church needs to provide a culturally relevant voice of reason that helps its singles to neither suppress their sexuality, nor express it inappropriately.

The biblical view of abstinence from sex outside of marriage (see for instance, 1 Corinthians 6:12 – 20) does not equate with suppression of sexuality. The single woman ‘...may not be sexually active but that is not to say that she is not sexually healthy’ (Feltner 1977, 89). The Christian’s best example of a single person who expressed their sexuality in a healthy way is Jesus. ‘Jesus was so wholly human, so comfortably masculine, that relationships with him could be warm and tender, affectionate and fun, serious and relaxing. Real’ (Huggett 1985, 41).

The church needs to positively reinforce abstinence (Payne 1994, 99) and promote healthy expression of sexuality. Ways in which singles can be encouraged to express their sexuality in a healthy manner include, firstly, encouraging them ‘...to develop the creative side of their personality and consciously to see that as a significant aspect of sexuality’ (Wright 1992, 89). Secondly, ‘[i]n dealing with biological urges, it is important simply to accept them as indications of normality’ (Foyle 1985, 140). Thirdly, to encourage them to talk with someone of the same sex, whom they can trust, about their sexuality and any frustrations that they have (Yuill 1995, 125). Fourthly, to encourage lovingly healthy affection (Forbes 1979, 17). The healthy expression of a person’s sexuality helps them to improve their relationships with other people as they are ‘...free to meet [others] on a more mature, holistic basis’ (Sell 1995, 326).

Celibacy is a gift

Celibacy can be used to refer to the current absence of a sexual partner, due to either circumstance or choice. Alternatively it can be a life-long commitment as an act of dedication to God. Some consider celibacy to be a spiritual ‘gift.’ ‘Celibacy can be seen as one of those [spiritual] gifts, to be used for the benefit of others’ (Wright 1992, 24). Some spiritual gift assessment tools list ‘celibacy’ as a possible spiritual gift that a person may have. This can lead a person to think that if they have the gift of celibacy they will never get married. The writer recalls completing a ‘Finding Your Spiritual Gifts’ questionnaire (Wagner, Peter), many years ago in a group where a friend discovered that she had the ‘gift’ of celibacy. She desperately wanted to know how to get rid of it! The writer suspects that this attitude is reflected in the results of the writer’s questionnaire (see *Chapter 6*) as only three respondents, four percent, believed they had the ‘gift’ of celibacy.

Considering a person’s marital state to be a ‘gift’ can be misleading. It implies that a person’s marital status is something that the Holy Spirit specifically bestows upon a person for the purpose of benefiting others. ‘Paul never uses the phrase “gift of singleness” or “gift of celibacy”’ (Hsu 1998, 58). A person’s marital status is not a ‘gift’ like those noted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. ‘The words and the context are different’ (Hsu 1998, 60). The spiritual gifts noted by Paul are ‘functions’, not states of being. ‘Singleness is not a functional gift; there is no such action as “singling”’ (Hsu 1998, 61).

Rather than being a gift **FROM** God, the writer believes that a person's marital status can become a gift **TO** God. When a person offers their singleness to God, he can use it as something that enhances their life and aids their ministry.

God's plans for a person are not limited by their marital status, unless the person uses their marital status to limit God (Whelchel 2001, 63). Sadly, some never-married women use their singleness as an excuse for putting parts of their life and ministry on hold until they marry. This means that they can miss out on enjoying the positive aspects of being single and using them to enrich their ministry. Such people

...live life as though waiting for something or someone to happen to them. They act as though they are in limbo, waiting to become capable of life when that magic day at the altar finally arrives (Wright 1997, 26 – 27).

A never-married Christian woman's perception that her life and ministry will significantly improve once she becomes married is unrealistic. Marriage does not guarantee an enhanced ministry, nor '...was not instituted by God as a "quick fix" for personal problems" (Cool 1987, 14).

A never-married Christian woman's singleness can be richly used by God to empower her ministry if she offers it to him. Such women may also be used by God to inspire others. 'Singleness itself is not a problem and the more singles there are who underline this by exercising an effective ministry, whatever that may be, the better models there will be for others to follow' (Wright 1992, 125). The church needs to embrace and encourage singles and their ministries. 'We... need to celebrate much more effectively the gift of single people to the church on every level' (Burk 1977, 78).

Chapter 4

Further Challenges Facing Singles

Reasons for singleness

The only thing common to all single people is the absence of a spouse. They work in various occupations, are single for differing reasons and are any age. 'The great majority of single people are not single by choice...' (Wraight 1992, 20).

Not everyone who wants to be married will be married (Andrews 1972, 11). Some singles '...want to marry as badly as they want to go to Heaven' (Jones & Kendall 1998, 110). Such people have not necessarily been kept single by God. Some believe that if you are single, it is because it is God's plan for your life. Muto (1985, 63 - 64) believes that, '[t]here is a reason for one's being single. The challenge of a lifetime is to discover what that is.' This type of attitude can lead singles to believe that either something is wrong with them, and/ or God is cruelly punishing them until they learn their lesson, and/ or their dissatisfaction with their singleness is unjustifiable. 'Self-blame not only keeps you from taking real responsibility for your problems, but it also breeds self-loathing' (Xavier & Kiersky 1999, 37). Where justified, it is important that people identify problems in their lives and seek to rectify them. However, the writer suspects that most never-marrieds need to correct their perceptions and theology of singleness, and the church needs to provide them with a nurturing environment in which this can occur.

Not everything in life is an intended lesson from God. Rather, when unintended things happen, God can make the best of our situations when we hand them over to him in prayer and faithfully expect him to make good things come of that situation. 'If I really believe God is in charge and loves and cares for me, I can trust him with anything and everything' (Smoke 2000, 41). Irrespective of whether a person wants to be single or not '...they can find a much greater calling than marriage if they are able to accept their singleness in the depths of their hearts' (Arnold 1996, 17).

Some struggles for singles

'The nature of single life demands self-sufficiency' (Widder 2000, 111). This can be a heavy burden for many never-marrieds. Clinebell (1977, 108) notes,

Life has more than enough frustration for all of us, but many who are [single]... have even heavier loads. ...[S]ingle adults ...live with loneliness, pressures and life experiences which are hard for most married persons to imagine.

For never-married women, this includes being '...forced to make decisions about matters traditionally considered in the male domain' (Koons & Anthony 1991, 43). This includes various matters such as finance, motor and resource issues. One questionnaire respondent noted that one of the significant issues that she struggled with as a single Christian woman was, 'always having to "organise" support resources etc that are 'naturally there' in a couple situation' (ID 2121/10, Appendix F). Further struggles as identified by the questionnaire respondents will be introduced in *Chapter 6*.

Bitterness regarding singleness

'For those who do not find a partner in marriage but feel no calling to remain single for the sake of Jesus, there is a danger of bitterness' (Arnold 1996, 18). This can lead to a hardening of the heart that causes a blockage in one's relationship with Christ, self and others. It can be good to be '...angry about the inequalities that exist between single and married people.... But if the anger never evolves into understanding, forgiveness, and action, the result is bitterness.' (Xavier & Kiersky 1999, 45-46).

Bitterness is a destructive force among singles (Widder 2000, 171). It drains them of energy. 'A woman who struggles with being single has little energy left to give anything – not work, not friends or family, not God' (Forbes 1979, 17). Bitterness also impacts a never-married Christian woman's ability to enjoy her singleness. 'Singles frequently sabotage themselves when it comes to enjoying their singlehood' (Landgraf 1982, 35). They can tend to focus on what they do not have - that is, a spouse and perhaps children - rather than what they do have.

SECTION B

Chapter 5

Quantitative Research Methodology

In order to discover some opinions of never-married women within the Baptist church in Sydney the writer developed a questionnaire (see Appendix B which provides a copy of the questionnaire containing codes to identify each of the statements. These codes are used in the graphical representations found throughout *Chapter 6*). The questionnaire was aimed at uncovering the respondent's attitudes towards their single status, their church's level of pastoral care for them (with respect to their singleness) and how this could potentially be improved. The writer referred to the book, 'Do it Yourself Social Research' (Wadsworth 1997) to help design, develop, distribute and analyse the questionnaire and its results. The analysis of the results can be found in *Chapter 6*. The raw data can be found in Appendices C – H.

Once the questionnaire had been developed, the writer contacted senior Pastors and key individuals at various Baptist churches in Sydney in order to request their participation in her project. All of them were happy to help.

The writer sent the questionnaires with a covering letter (see Appendix A) to the key individuals at each church. These people distributed the questionnaires to various never-married women at their church. The questionnaires were later recollected by the key individuals and returned to the writer by mid-November 2002.

Approximately 130 questionnaires were distributed to the key individuals at 17 churches throughout Sydney, NSW (see Appendix C). 75 results were received. This indicates that the return rate was approximately fifty-eight percent.

The writer originally hoped to interview a selection of willing respondents in order to present case studies within this thesis as indicated on the first page of the questionnaire (see Appendix B). Over half (39) of the respondents indicated that they would be happy to be interviewed. Unfortunately, time and word constraints meant that no interviews took place.

Chapter 6

Analysis of Questionnaire Results

Part A

Part A of the questionnaire was designed to identify the answers to two main areas. Firstly, whether or not the respondent was happy being single. Secondly, whether or not the respondent felt that their church adequately pastorally cared for them as a single Christian woman.

20 women had an average score of less than 5.0 for the statements relating to personal satisfaction concerning their single status (see Appendix D). This indicated that 26.67% of the respondents were generally unsatisfied with their single status. Of this 20, 11 women had an average score of less than 5.0 for the statements relating to their satisfaction with their church's level of pastoral care aimed at singles. This indicated that 55% of the respondents who were not happy with their single status, also did not feel that their church adequately pastorally cared for this difficulty in their lives.

54 women had an average score of 5.0 or greater for the statements relating to personal satisfaction concerning their single status (see Appendix D). This indicated that 72.97% of the respondents were generally satisfied with their single status. Of this 54, 17 women had an average score of less than 5.0 for the statements relating to their satisfaction with their church's level of pastoral care aimed at singles. This indicated that 31.48% of the respondents who were happy with their single status, did not feel that their church adequately pastorally cared for single people.

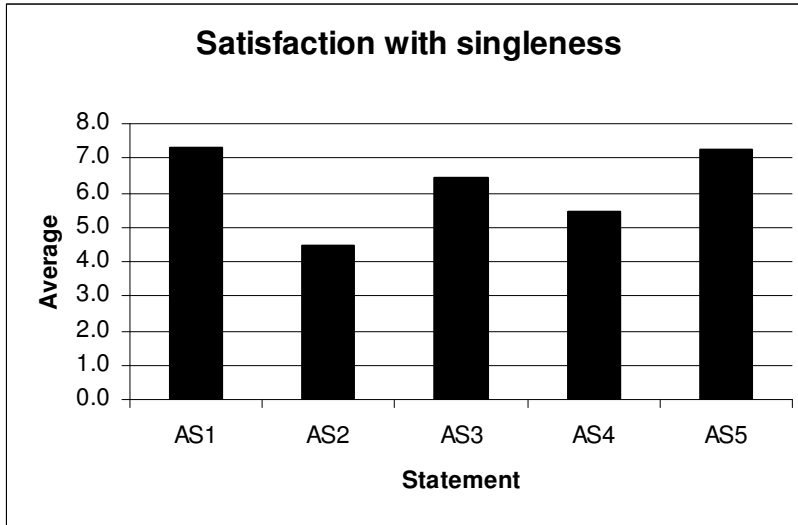
Irrespective of the level of personal satisfaction concerning an individual respondent's single status, 28 women had an average score of less than 5.0 for the statements relating to their church's level of pastoral care for them as a single Christian woman. This indicated that 37.84% of the respondents were unhappy with the level of pastoral care they received concerning their singleness. Although this was a minority, the writer considered it to be a significant percentage.

A graphical representation of the average score for each of the statements in Part A can be found below. Only three statements had an average score below 5.0 (see also Appendix D).

One related to personal satisfaction and the remaining two related to the pastoral care of the respondent's church.

The averages scores for each of the statements relating to personal satisfaction concerning singleness:

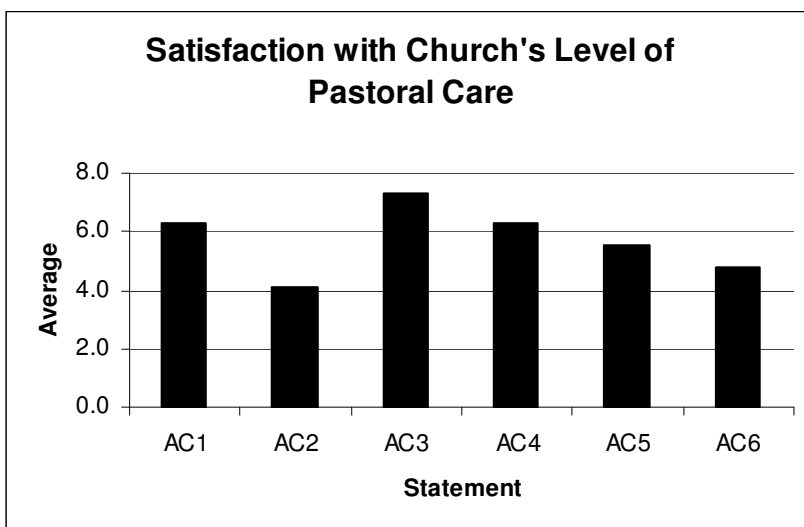
Question	AS1	AS2	AS3	AS4	AS5
Average	7.3	4.5	6.4	5.4	7.2



The lowest average for the statements relating to personal satisfaction with single status was 4.5 for the statement, 'I had no expectations that I would be married by a certain age,' that is, statement AS2. 46 respondents had a score of less than 5.0, indicating that 62.16% of all respondents expected to be married by a certain age.

The averages scores for each of the statements relating to the level of pastoral care of the respondent's church:

Question	AC1	AC2	AC3	AC4	AC5	AC6
Average	6.3	4.1	7.3	6.3	5.5	4.8



The lowest average for the statements relating satisfaction with the church's pastoral care of the respondents as single women was 4.1 for the statement, 'There is a strong ministry to single people at my church,' that is, statement AC2. 45 respondents had a score of less than 5.0, indicating that 60.81% of all respondents did not consider there to be a strong ministry to singles at their church. The second lowest average was 4.8 for the statement, 'I believe that most married people at my church are sensitive to the struggles that single Christian women can have,' that is, statement AC6. 34 respondents had a score of less than 5.0, indicating that 45.95% of all respondents did not believe that the majority of married people in their church were sensitive to their struggles.

These results led the writer to believe two things concerning pastoral care in churches that have a significant single population. Firstly, it would be helpful to increase singles ministries within the church. Secondly, it would be wise to heighten the awareness of married people within the church to the issues that singles predominantly struggle with. For these reasons, *Section C* considers some unhelpful attitudes and things that married people and the church in general have and do in relation to never-married women. It also considers what improvements, predominantly inspired by the results to Part B of the questionnaire, can be made in these areas.

Part B

For each of the questions in Part B, the respondents were invited to select more than one answer and to rank their responses. '1' indicated that the issue was a primary concern for them, '2' indicated that it was a secondary concern and so on. For each response, I have indicated the

number of respondents who considered the issue to be a primary concern. Where significant, the writer has indicated the number that considered the issue to be a secondary concern. The graphical representations of Part B highlight the number of respondents who had an option as their first choice, added to the number who had the option as any other choice. The results are as follows:

Question 1 – ‘I believe that I am single because:’

Question 1 in Part B of the questionnaire was designed to try and identify why the respondents believed that they were still single.

B1a - ‘I am still waiting to meet the right person’

55 (73.33%) women indicated that they were still waiting for the right man. 51 of these women (68% of the total number) indicated that it was the primary reason they were still single.

B1b - ‘I chose to remain permanently single due to my sexual orientation’

One woman listed, as option 3, that she was single due to her sexual orientation. The writer suspects that this is because she did not realise that she could limit the number of her responses to only one or two options. She listed having the ‘gift’ of celibacy as her fourth option (ID 2150/4, Appendix E).

B1c - ‘I chose to remain permanently single because I have the gift of celibacy’

Only three women (4%) indicated that they were single because they had the gift of celibacy. One lady listed it as their primary reason for being single. Another lady listed it as her secondary reason for being single. The primary reason for both ladies was, ‘I am still waiting to meet the right person.’ The third lady listed it as her fourth choice, as mentioned above.

B1d - ‘I chose to remain temporarily single because I have things that I want to achieve before getting married’

16 (21.33%) women indicated that they are still single because they have a lot to achieve before getting married. Of the 16, four people listed it as being their primary reason for remaining single (with three of the four indicating that their secondary reason for remaining single was because they had not yet met the right man). 12 people listed it as being a secondary reason to not having found the right person yet.

Nine of the 16 women were aged between 18-24 (this represented 50% of the total number of 18-24 year olds who completed the questionnaire).

Five of the 16 women were aged between 25-29 (this represented 35.71% of the total number of 24-29 year olds who completed the questionnaire).

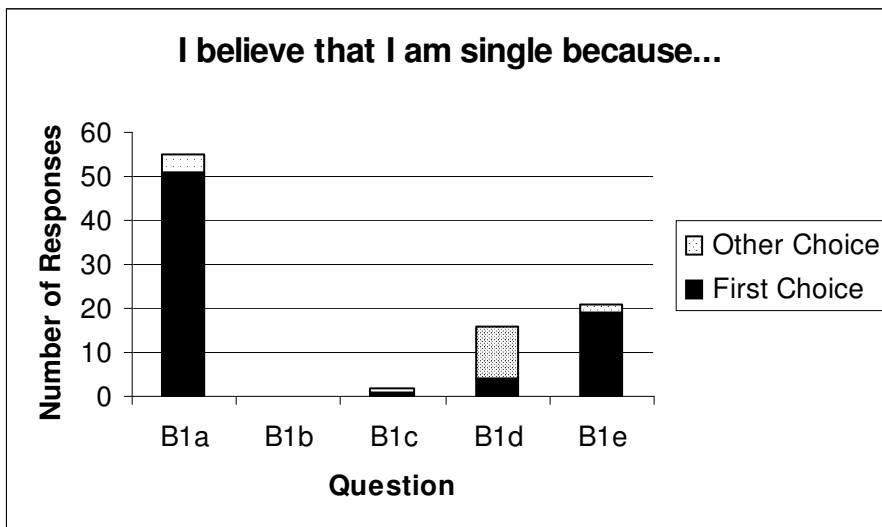
Two of the 16 women were aged between 30-34 (this represented 18.18% of the total number of 30-34 year olds who completed the questionnaire).

B1e - 'Other'

21 (28%) indicated that they had other reasons for remaining single. Ten of these women essentially indicated that the reason for their singleness was God. For instance, one lady said, 'It was and is God's plan for my life.' For a complete list of the various reasons that women gave for being single, please see Appendix E.

Graphical representation of the results for question 1:

Question	B1a	B1b	B1c	B1d	B1e
First Choice	51	0	1	4	19
Other Choice	4	0	1	12	2
Total	55	0	2	16	21



Most of the respondents (73.33%), irrespective of age, believed that they were still single because they had not yet found the right person to marry. This seemed to indicate that many of the respondents still hoped that they would one day marry. Some of them would have been

making the most of their time as a single person. Others may have been waiting to marry before they considered exploring their full potential. Ironically, an individual's singleness provides them with more time, and possibly resources, to discover their full potential. This is one of the main reasons the writer believes it is essential for churches to encourage and equip its singles to do this and live fully empowered, joyous lives for Christ. A single person who explores their full potential in Christ will be better equipped for marriage (if they do eventually marry) than a single person who spends their time simply waiting for the right person to come along.

Question 2 – 'I consider the most difficult issues/s faced by single Christian women today to be:'

Question 2 in Part B of the questionnaire was designed to try and identify the most significant struggles experienced by single Christian women in today's society.

B2a - 'There are none'

Only two women (2.67%) did not consider there to be any difficult issues for single Christian women today. One was aged between 60-69, and the other was over 70. The writer suspects that these ladies are thinking comparatively to when they were younger and the struggles that they faced.

B2b - 'Feeling alienated in the church'

18 women (24%) indicated that they felt alienated as a single woman in their church. Of these 18, only three indicated that it was their primary concern.

B2c - 'Issues pertaining to safety'

19 women (25.33%) indicated that safety issues were of concern to them as single women. Only three of the 19 considered it to be their primary concern.

B2d - 'Issues pertaining to sexuality'

30 women (40%) indicated that issues pertaining to sexuality caused them to struggle as single Christian women. Only three of the 30 considered it to be their primary concern.

B2e - 'Issues pertaining to loneliness'

56 women (74.67%) indicated that loneliness was an issue for them. 37 of the 56 considered it to be their primary concern. 15 of the 56 considered it to be their secondary concern. This

appeared to be a major issue that needs to be addressed by the church. It will be considered in depth in *Chapter 10*.

B2f - 'Wanting to have children'

39 women (52%) indicated that a desire to have children was an issue that they struggled with as single women. Only five of the 39 considered it to be a primary concern. 15 women considered it to be a secondary concern.

B2g - 'Coping with male orientated tasks'

21 women (28%) indicated dealing with male orientated tasks as being a difficult issue for single women. Only three of the 21 women considered it to be a primary concern.

B2h - 'Living in a world that seems to be made for two'

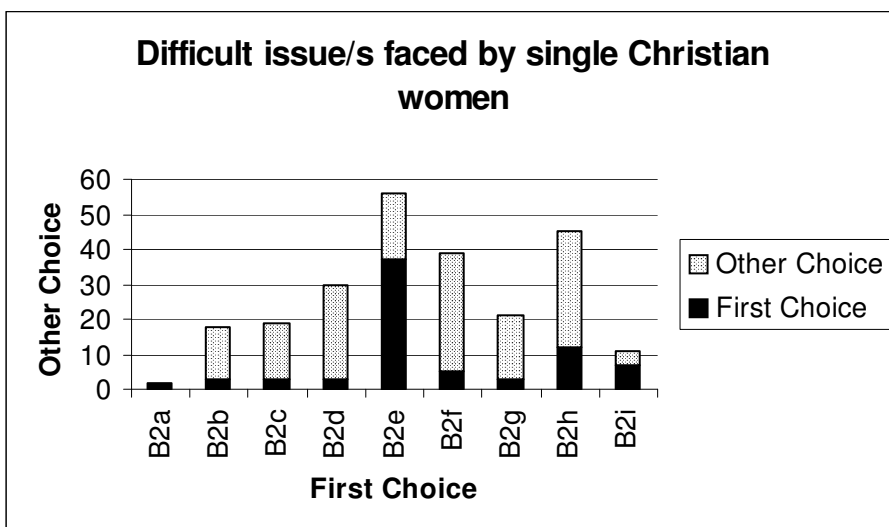
45 women (60%) indicated that it can be difficult for a single person to live in a world that seems to be made for two. 12 of the 45 women considered it to be a primary concern. 12 of the 45 women considered it to be a secondary concern.

B2i - 'Other'

Only 11 (14.67%) of the 75 women identified an 'other' difficult issues for single Christian women. A variety of different issues were raised that can be seen in Appendix F.

Graphical representation of the results for question 2:

Question	B2a	B2b	B2c	B2d	B2e	B2f	B2g	B2h	B2i
First Choice	2	3	3	3	37	5	3	12	7
Other Choice	0	15	16	27	19	34	18	33	4
Total	2	18	19	30	56	39	21	45	11



The most significant responses to question 2 in Part B, as indicated by over 50% of the respondents were, firstly, issues pertaining to loneliness, and secondly, living in a world that seems to be made for two and finally, wanting to have children. Although the issue of wanting to have children was a significant one, it was rarely a primary concern for the women.

Question 3 – ‘Singles ministries that I would be interested in having at my church include:’

Question 3 in Part B of the questionnaire was designed to try and identify ways in which the church can help to address the most significant struggles experienced by Christian women in today’s society.

B3a - ‘None’

10 (13.33%) women selected the response that there was no need for any singles’ ministries at their church.

B3b - ‘Having a single person as part of the pastoral team at my church’

21 women (28%) indicated that they would like to have a single person on their pastoral team at work. 13 of the 21 women considered this to be their primary interest for singles ministries at their church.

B3c - 'A single's bible study group'

11 women (14.67%) indicated that they would like to have a singles bible study group at their church. 6 of the 11 women considered this to be their primary interest for singles ministries at their church.

B3d - 'Some literature aimed at singles available in my church library'

13 women (17.33%) indicated that they would like to have literature aimed at singles readily available to them at church. Only 1 of the 13 women considered this to be their primary interest for singles ministries at their church.

B3e - 'A few more sermons or sermon illustrations aimed at singles'

35 women (46.67%) indicated that they would like to have a few more sermons, or sermon illustrations, aimed at singles in their church. 17 of the 35 women indicated that this was their primary interest for singles' ministry at their church. 11 of the 35 indicated that it was their secondary interest.

B3f - 'Occasional seminars on issues aimed at singles'

31 women (41.33%) indicated that they would like to have occasional seminars aimed at single's issues. 13 of the 31 women considered this to be their primary interest for singles' ministries at their church. 10 of the 31 considered it to be their secondary interest.

B3g - 'A prayer partner who understands the issues faced by single people'

18 women (24%) indicated that they would like to have a prayer partner who understands issues faced by single people. Only 4 women considered it to be a primary interest.

B3h - 'Social activities specifically for single people'

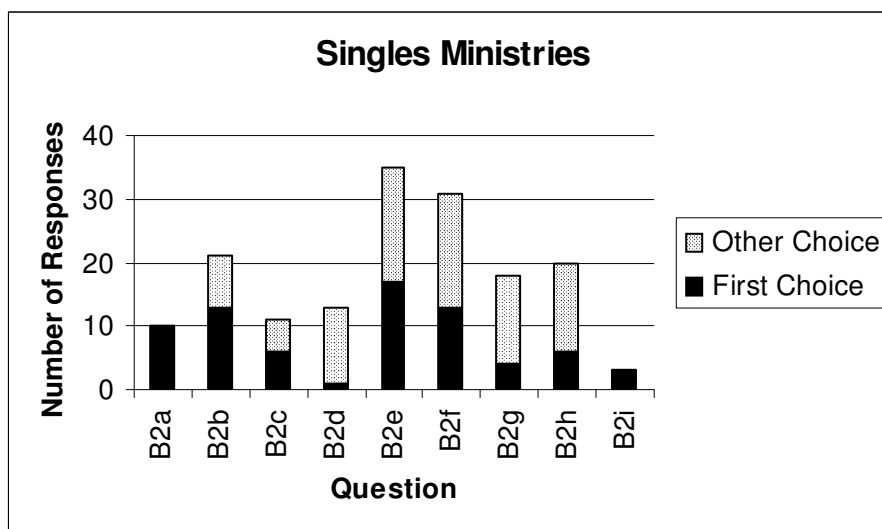
20 women (26.67%) indicated that they are interested in social activities aimed at singles at their church. 8 of these women were aged between 18-24. The remaining women interested in singles activities were fairly evenly distributed across the age range.

B3i - 'Other'

Only three women (4%) indicated that there were other activities that they would be interested in at their church. The explanations given can be found in Appendix G.

Graphical representation of the results for question 3:

Question	B2a	B2b	B2c	B2d	B2e	B2f	B2g	B2h	B2i
First Choice	10	13	6	1	17	13	4	6	3
Other Choice	0	8	5	12	18	18	14	14	0
Total	10	21	11	13	35	31	18	20	3



The most significant responses to question 3 in Part B, as indicated by over 40% of the respondents were having, firstly, a few more sermons or sermon illustrations aimed at singles, and secondly, occasional seminars on issues aimed at singles. Although the third highest response, namely 'having a single person as part of the pastoral team at my church,' was selected by only 28%, it is significant that 13 of those who selected it listed it as a primary interest. This is the same number as those who selected 'occasional seminars on issues aimed at singles' as a primary interest. These responses indicated to the writer that a 'top down' approach is required concerning ministry to singles in Australia. This is further explored in *Chapter 8*.

Question 4 – 'Feeling pressured to be married by'

Question 4 in Part B of the questionnaire was designed to try and identify which external or internal sources prompt single women to feel pressured to be married either currently or previously.

Previously - Myself

20 women (26.67%) indicated that they had previously felt pressured to be married by themselves. 10 of the 20 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Currently - Myself

25 women (33.33%) indicated that they currently feel pressured to be married by themselves. 18 of the 25 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Previously - Friends

15 women (20%) indicated that they had previously felt pressured to be married by their friends. 9 of the 15 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Currently - Friends

15 women (20%) indicated that they currently feel pressured to marry by their friends. 8 of the 15 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Previously – Family

22 women (29.33%) indicated that they had previously felt pressured to be married by their family. 15 of the 22 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Currently – Family

19 women (25.33%) indicated that they currently feel pressured to be married by their family. 9 of the 19 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Previously – Church

15 women (20%) indicated that they had previously felt pressured to be married by their church. 5 of the 15 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Currently – Church

12 women (16%) indicated that they currently feel pressured to be married by their church. 3 of the 12 women indicated that this was their primary source of pressure.

Previously & Currently – I do not feel, nor have I ever felt, any pressure to be married

18 women (24%) indicated that they do not feel, nor have they ever felt pressured to be married.

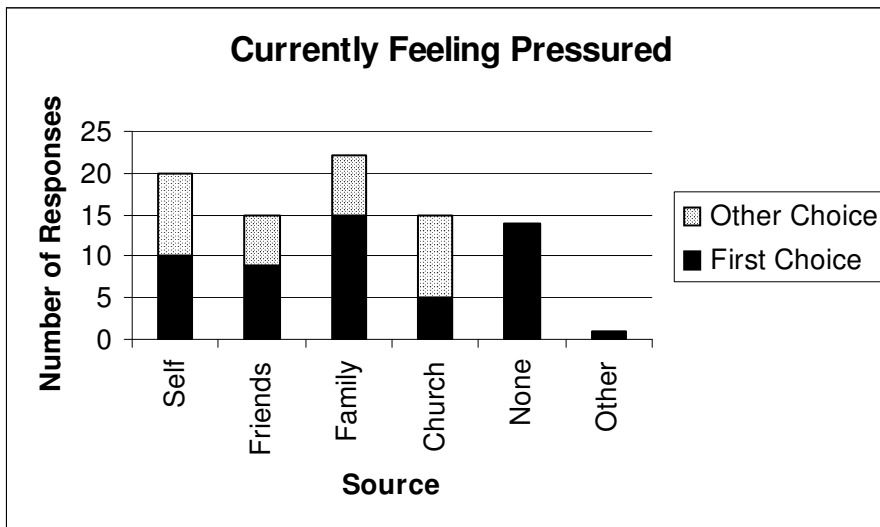
Previously & Currently - Other

5 women (6.67%) indicated other reasons for either previously or currently feeling pressured to be married. These reasons can be found in Appendix H.

Graphical representation of the results for question 4:

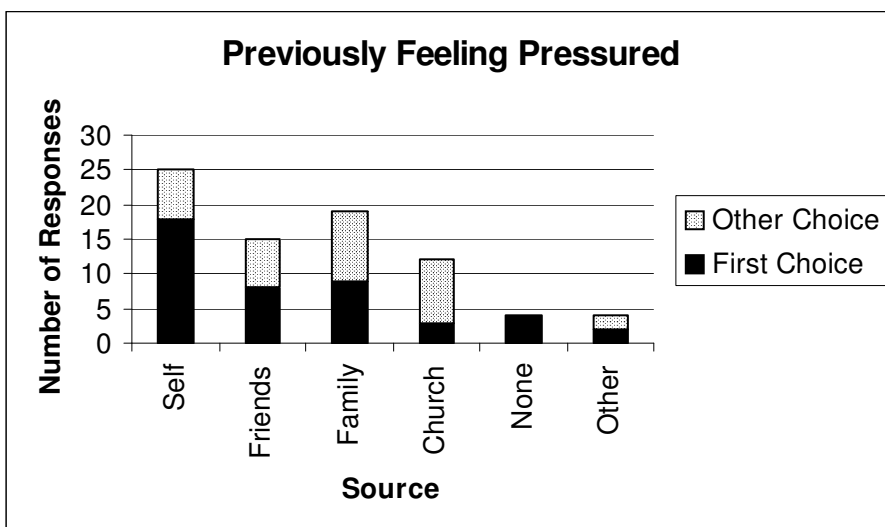
Current

Question	Self	Friends	Family	Church	None	Other
First Choice	10	9	15	5	14	1
Other Choice	10	6	7	10	0	0
Total	20	15	22	15	14	1



Previous

Question	Self	Friends	Family	Church	None	Other
First Choice	18	8	9	3	4	2
Other Choice	7	7	10	9	0	2
Total	25	15	19	12	4	4



Self and family were listed as being the main current (or previous) sources of pressure concerning a respondent's marital status. The writer found it encouraging that the church was generally not thought to be one of the main contributors. However, various sources of pressure (self, family and friends) attend church. The writer believes that church needs to re-educate its members and heighten awareness of the equal value of all people irrespective of their marital status. Some of the theory behind the reason for singles feeling pressured to be married was explored in *Section A*. The church's role in possible solutions will be explored in *Section C*.

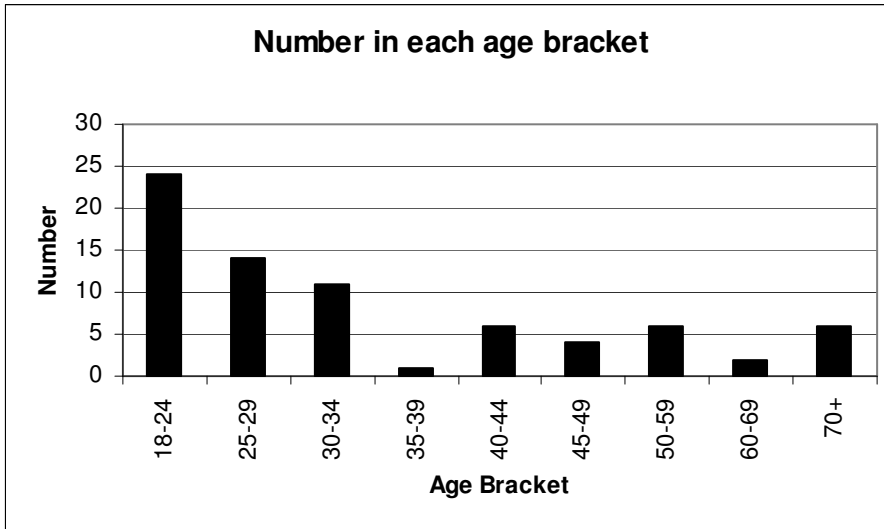
Part C

Part C of the questionnaire was designed to identify some basic statistical information concerning the respondents. The results are:

The age distribution of the respondents was as follows:

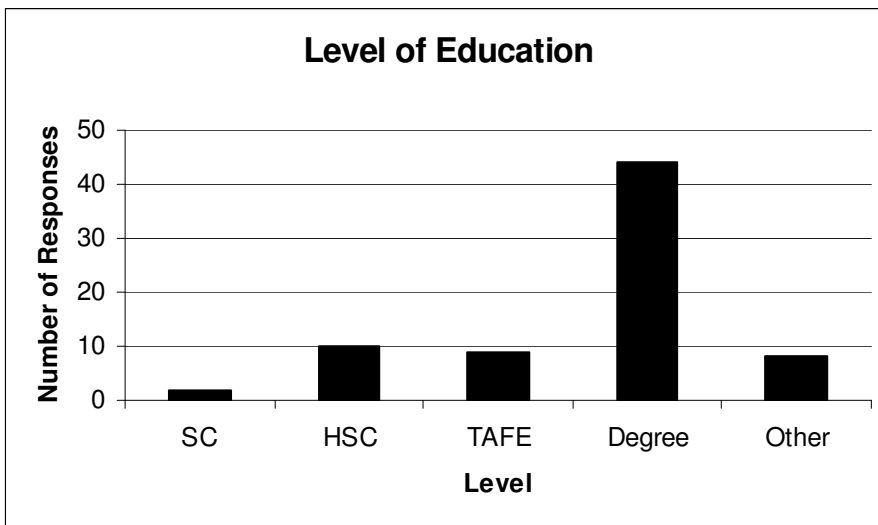
- 1 **(1.33%)** Declined to respond
- 24 **(32%)** respondents were aged between **18-24**
- 14 **(18.67%)** respondents were aged between **25-29**
- 11 **(14.67%)** respondents were aged between **30-34**
- 1 **(1.33%)** respondent was aged between **35-39**
- 6 **(8%)** respondents were aged between **40-44**
- 4 **(5.33%)** respondents were aged between **45-49**
- 6 **(8%)** respondents were aged between **50-59**
- 2 **(2.67%)** respondents were aged between **60-69**

6 (8%) respondents were aged **over 70**.



The education breakdown was as follows:

- 2 (2.67%) Declined to respond
- 2 (2.67%) SC
- 10 (13.33%) HSC
- 8 (10.67%) Assorted courses
- 9 (12%) TAFE
- 44 (58.67%) Degree



Many of those who had HSC level education were working on obtaining a degree. It is interesting to note that the majority of respondents were well-educated single women under the age of 35.

SECTION C

Chapter 7

An Introduction to Singles' Ministries

Aim of singles' ministry

Any local church wishing to engage in single's ministries should be clear in their aim. As should be the aim of any ministry, the goal of singles' ministry is to help individuals to strive to reach their full potential in Christ. 'Who we are in Christ is of far greater importance than our marital status, or a sin with which we struggle, or the season of life we are in' (Langberg 1996, 10). Singles need to know and believe that '[t]he true condition for finding peace is not one's marital status but faithfulness and obedience to the revealed will of God' (Koons & Anthony 1991, 88). Singles should be encouraged and assisted to grow '...emotionally, interpersonally, spiritually, and in other important ways – with less of the lonesome and vacuous existence many singles presently suffer, and with less of a need to run away from singlehood' (Landgraf 1982, 73).

Chapter 8

A Top-Down Approach

As mentioned at the end of Part B in *Chapter 6*, never-marrieds may feel external and internal pressures to be married. In order to reduce this pressure they need to accept their singleness as part of their identity, acknowledge its limitations and rejoice in its advantages. However, it is the writer's experience that many never-marrieds can have a pessimistic, ingrained perception of their singleness. This means that they can feel as though an acceptance of singleness as part of their identity is similar to accepting a disability and/ or they can fear that it will reduce their chances of being married. Hence they resist any promptings to accept singleness as part of their identity. Some people need to be re-educated to realise that '[s]ingleness in itself is neither incomplete nor broken nor sad. It is simply one of several states of being' (Collier-Slone 1993, 9).

Christians generally tend to have more negative perceptions of singleness than they do of marriage. A significant contributing factor to such perceptions is reinforcing subliminal and overt messages concerning the elevation of marriage above singleness from society and, unfortunately, the church. This can result in singles feeling oppressed at a conscious and/ or subconscious level/s. Since people who feel oppressed can find it difficult to assert a positive attitude regarding their oppression, it is important that the church do what it can to create a more positive environment in which singles can thrive rather than feel oppressed at any level. The writer advocates a top-down approach concerning ministry to singles and in particular never-marrieds in Australia.

Theological institutions

A top-down approach to any ministry concerning singles must start with theological institutions. To date, '...there has been no recognition of the fact that there is, indeed, a difference in issues of singleness nor has there been any movement toward specific trained ministry to work in this area' (Collier-Slone 1993, 11). Our Christian leaders need to be taught to consciously provide a welcoming environment for singles in which they can thrive.

Emerging and existing clergy must be trained in concepts of single ministry through seminary coursework in the area of pastoral theology, field work in clinical pastoral

education, continuing education seminars, mentor relationships, and trainer courses (Collier-Slone 1993, 78).

In the writer's theological college various lectures (predominantly in the area of Pastoral Studies) focus on family life with a significant majority of the time being dedicated to issues pertaining to marriage and child rearing, and the remaining minority of time dedicated to issues pertaining to singleness. Since any congregation generally contains singles, married and/ or parents, the writer believes that more equitable amounts of time should be given to the issues pertaining to each status. Otherwise, singleness can be unintentionally trivialised and future pastors can have an inadequate theology when caring for never-marrieds who are struggling with their status.

Additionally, single students should be offered the opportunity to enhance their lives as singles. A 'Marriage Enrichment' seminar is offered at the writer's theological college to the married students with no alternative offered to the single students – in spite of their increasing in number.

We hear of "Marriage **Enrichment**" programmes, designed to improve something that is already good. On the other hand, programmes for single people are entitled "**Coping** with singleness", as if "singleness" is a problem with which single people must learn to live (Payne 1994, 47).

It could be quite empowering to offer singles at theological colleges and local churches seminars on 'enriching your single life' as an alternative to 'marriage enrichment' seminars. Examples of topics that could be covered in such a seminar include, 'Biblical teaching and examples,' 'Theology,' 'The church (throughout history to the current day),' 'Breaking down the stereotypes,' 'Advantages of being single,' 'Loneliness,' 'Boundaries,' 'Support Networks,' 'Ethics,' 'Giftings/ Ministries/ Mentoring' and 'Evangelism.'

The church

'A key role for ministers is that of being aware of the need for a singles ministry' (Johnson 1982, 96). It is imperative that pastors, irrespective of their own marital status, model intentionally inclusive approaches to their ministries. Currently, it can seem as though many pastors only acknowledge and value marriage. 'Let singleness be included in preaching, modelled in lives and dealt with positively in pastoral situations' (Wraight 1992, 127). One simple, practical way in which pastors can help never-marrieds to feel more validated is by injecting healthy illustrations aimed at singles into their sermons. The vast majority of sermon illustrations very rarely

specifically address singleness, whereas they do frequently refer to marriage and family life. ‘...[T]he constant use of family stories in our sermon illustrations can remind the single of their position in life’ (Richardson 2001, 3).

Approximately forty-seven percent of the questionnaire respondents (see *Chapter 6*) said that they would be interested in having a few more sermons or sermon illustrations aimed at singles. It can be meaningful to have occasional sermons on singleness in order to provide a helpful theological framework on issues faced by singles. One questionnaire respondent noted, ‘Maybe a sermon on the topic and its challenges occasionally, for all the congregation, would help’ (ID 2137/6, Appendix J). Another lady commented, ‘I have not heard many sermons on singleness but a lot on marriage. ... I sometimes feel no emphasis is put on singleness as a Christian and feel that it is not a valid lifestyle choice if the individual chooses to remain single’ (ID 2756/5, Appendix J).

Another practical way in which pastors can help singles to feel embraced and validated by the church is by using more inclusive language. ‘Just as churches have begun to recognise the need for gender-inclusive language, they need to use language that is inclusive of singles’ (Hsu 1998, 149). Initially inclusive language may need to be used in the church to the point that it may seem as though singleness is being favoured over marriage. ‘[P]erhaps churches even need to make a point, intentionally and verbally, of including and welcoming singles from the pulpit’ (Hsu 1998, 150). However, this would need to be done in a sensitive and culturally relevant way so as not to further alienate never-marrieds. Initially, overt attention may need to be given to singles in order to bring about change – that is, normalise singleness so that it is considered to be of equal value to marriage.

The congregation also needs to be encouraged to consciously use more inclusive language. Singles can feel left out of church events due to the exclusive language, rather than lack of invitation. For instance, in announcements, the use of ‘...the word *household* instead will show awareness of the nontraditional families and singles present in the congregation’ (Sell 1995, 146). A more playful and inclusive alternative is to invite ‘whoever lives at your place’ to church outing. Another example of an inclusive term is the ‘church community,’ as opposed to the ‘church family’ – which can be offensive to some singles who resent not having their own family.

Church activities can exclude singles either by name or underlying assumptions. For instance, ‘Dinners for Six’ (or ‘Eight’) can be seemingly exclusive because they assume that an even

number of people will be at the dinner. One questionnaire respondent commented, 'Dinners for 6 are ONLY for married people. I feel very excluded' (ID 2131/4, Appendix G). The church needs to be more inclusive in order to help all people within the body of Christ feel valued, and to be more attractive and inviting to those outside. For instance, why not have dinners for an odd number of people? Naturally it would be helpful to ensure that at least three of the people at the dinner were single, rather than having one single person with several couples. This would challenge people to think about singles in their congregation and invite them for dinner. A church could run 'Dinners for Seven at 7:00!'

As previously mentioned, unfortunately the societal pressure to have a 'significant other' is echoed by the church. Christian females are often explicitly and implicitly taught as they are growing up that '...God's best for woman is marriage' (Forbes 1979, 16). There is an '...often unspoken assumption that someone who has no "other half" is incomplete, even slightly odd' (Wraight 1992, 24). This can cause alienation between marrieds and singles and a growing dissatisfaction, particularly for never-marrieds, concerning their single status. 'Given years of such training, no wonder that Christian women look upon singleness as a burden. A cross. A thorn in the flesh. God's refining fire' (Forbes 1979, 16). Such attitudes can lead to an unhealthy idolisation of marriage (Whelchel 2001, 27). The church needs to educate itself regarding the advantages, and challenges of both marital states.

One of the aims of a local church should be to consciously seek to enrich the lives of its members. This includes ministering to singles. Local churches rarely have a ministry to singles, and even when they do, the ministries are not always all-encompassing. 'It is rare to see church programs that emphasize personal growth and wholeness for the single adult or express an adequate theology of singleness' (Holmes 1996a, 5). Unfortunately, the church generally seems to contribute to the continual negative and often irresistible reinforcement that singles receive concerning the need to be in a romantic relationship. It is vital that the church reverses this situation and empowers single people.

Every church needs to ensure a holistic approach to their ministry that ensures mixing occurs between the various generations, sexes and marital statuses. The church needs to intentionally provide a place for singles that should be '...a climate in which persons can grow and develop. ...[T]here must be a place where I can go and be who I am and risk within that context, exploration, discovery, and change' (Dow 1977, 99). Singles, like all people, need to feel

accepted, understood, and incorporated into their local church (Sell 1995, 323). They need ‘...to be reminded of God’s love and the church’s care for them’ (Richardson 2001, 3).

The church needs to nurture an atmosphere of authenticity and open communication. A contemporary novel, and resulting film, that has been extremely popular amongst never-married women is ‘Bridget Jones’ Diary’ by Helen Fielding (2001). The story is about a never-married woman in her early thirties. It humorously vocalises thoughts and feelings that many never-marrieds have but are scared to admit. In this way the story helps to normalise these thoughts and feelings and thus gives never-married women permission to experience and express them. The church needs to provide a safe place for never-marrieds to open up about the positive and negative aspects of their status, and to still feel valued and accepted. The church needs ‘...to encourage them to open their hearts to others. [Life] is much harder if one keeps these feelings bottled up inside’ (Muto 1985, 62).

Although the church has made progress in regards to singles’ ministry, there is still a long way to go. Mutual education is vital. ‘Educating the church about singles and singles about singles’ (Collier-Slone 1993, 28). Approximately forty-one percent of the questionnaire respondents (see *Chapter 6*) indicated that they would like to have occasional seminars aimed at single’s issues. The church will not know what types of seminars will be of most interest to never-marrieds unless it discovers what they ‘...need from individuals in the body, as well as from the body as a whole’ (Langberg 1996, 13). This will naturally occur in an inclusive church that nurtures an atmosphere of authenticity and open communication.

Marrieds

‘...[S]ingleness is a growing phenomenon and stigmas against it will have to give way’ (Feltner 1977, 91). Marrieds can be tempted to have extreme views of singles. A married person may believe that a single person leads an uncomplicated life or that they lead a rather selfish and predominantly hedonistic life-style. Some may consider never-married women to be ‘...a source of temptation or a threat to marriages. This is cruel’ (Payne 1994, 39). ‘People who have spent their adult lives living married or coupled will find it very difficult to imagine what the lives of single people are really like, in terms of advantages and disadvantages’ (Collier-Slone 1993, 60). The same can be said of a never-married person’s view of marriage. Hybels (1994, 34-35) notes,

Most unmarried people have no idea what it takes to make a marriage work; they grossly underestimate the price people have to pay to build long-term, mutually satisfying relationships. And they fail to understand that the only people with the strength to pay that price are those who have plumbed the depths of their relationship with God, have dealt with their own brokenness, and have reached a place of happiness within the context of their singleness.

‘The concepts of family, singleness and marriage need a lot of deromanticizing and demythologizing in our churches’ (Burk 1977, 77). Marrieds and singles can educate each other concerning the realities of their statuses. For instance, marrieds can help singles to see ‘...that in reality, married life is not constant communication, daily roses, hugs and kisses, breakfast in bed, and sheer bliss’ (Jones & Kendall 1998, 170). Similarly, singles can help marrieds to see that

[a]lthough it is true that someone with a paranoid or psychopathic personality is more likely to be single, it does not follow that a single person is more likely to be paranoid or a psychopath (Xavier & Kiersky 1999, 22)!

There are positives and negatives aspects of both married and single life, yet our churches only seem to vocalise those of married life. The church seems to subtly imply that the issues singles face are not considered to be as serious or worthy of exploration as those experienced by married people. ‘Each lifestyle has its assets and liabilities, but it seems to me that we accept the liabilities of the married lifestyle more easily than we do the single lifestyle’ (Whelchel 2001, 155).

Some married people seem to believe that never-marrieds have a much easier and comparatively less complicated life than they do. This implies a very simplistic view of the single life. Approximately forty-six percent of all questionnaire respondents believed that the majority of married people in their church were not sensitive to their struggles as never-married women. The struggles faced by singles are not easier than those faced by marrieds, they are just different. ‘Life isn’t easy for anyone, single or married’ (Johnson 1982, 7). Local congregations need to be educated about singlehood.

Even a single person’s family can struggle to understand them because they have not followed the expected path of marriage and children. Fifty-two percent of all questionnaire respondents indicated that they either currently or have previously felt pressured to be married by their family. Pressure from a family may mean that a never-married person’s

...real concerns and feelings are never mentioned, because the family cannot or will not offer support in leading a happy single life, as opposed to expressing sympathy or concern about what they feel is an undesirable situation. Unless the parents and family understand that... a career, friendships, solitude and so on can be alternatives, not merely substitutes, for a husband and children, their support for a single woman may be generously given and valuable up to a point, but never complete (Britton 1982, 38).

When well-intentioned married people do try to comfort never-marrieds who long for a husband, due to a lack of understanding they can say things that do more harm than good. They can voice what single people hope for but cannot afford to believe. For instance, a married person might say, 'they always come along when you least expect it' or 'God will provide you a husband in his timing.' Widder (2000, 37) insightfully states, '...most days I can live with God's absence of answers. But sometimes, I allow myself to listen to the well-meaning advice of bystanders, and I choose to hear their answers above the silence of God.'

One questionnaire respondent said that the most significant struggle for never-married women is, 'People asking "when are you going to get married?"' (ID 2112/3, Appendix F). In the novel, 'Bridget Jones' Diary' (Fielding 2001, 11), Bridget is questioned about her love-life by the husband of one of her mother's friends. This prompts Bridget to wonder, 'Why can't married people understand that [these are] no longer polite question[s] to ask? We [never-marrieds] wouldn't rush up to *them* and roar, "How's your marriage going?"' Bridget's thoughts resonate with many never-married women who can be frustrated by the questions, and resulting reassurance of married people. Rather than reassuring a never-married woman, conversations of this nature only leave them feeling frustrated with both their current state and God. It is better to affirm and encourage a never-married woman as she is, rather than pressing her with thoughtless personal questions that imply she should have a man in her life, and/ or offering empty promises concerning what she might become.

As well as thoughtless questions and empty promises, marrieds can give advice that implies a single person is not only wrong to be unmarried, but that they are also at fault. This can lead a single person who wants to be married to feel a burden of guilt that stunts their growth. For instance, Cool (1987, 24) states, '[i]f you want to attract a good mate, get in shape physically. After all, not many people want a "heavyweight" lover!' Such advice is soul destroying and false. It implies that overweight single people who want to be married have brought their torment upon themselves by not being attractive enough. 'People who marry can be beautiful or ugly, short or

tall, fat or thin, charming or socially inept. Being single does not signify inadequacy any more than marriage symbolises success' (Payne 1994, 28).

As the body of Christ, it is important that we honour all parts equally. '...[W]hile anyone is in bondage, we all are in bondage. ...If I treat a single person as a nonperson, ...I become a stereotype myself because I am dealing in a falsehood' (Landgraf 1982, 29). One questionnaire respondent sadly noted, '...I still feel as if there's no one I can sit with at church today. I'm not a family or a couple' (ID 2773/2, Appendix J). It is important that '...we grant dignity, consideration, care and concern for those who are single' (Langberg 1996, 12).

Marrieds and singles need to educate each other in a mutually loving and edifying manner, concerning the advantages and disadvantages of both states. 'As structured opportunities for telling and hearing stories are provided, there can be a better understanding both intergroup and intragroup' (Collier-Slone 1993, 62). Such education should assist both groups in finding creative ways of helping each other. '...[F]or instance, marrieds can soften the loneliness of the single, and the single can aid marrieds in the demanding task of parenthood' (Clapp 1993, 113).

It is good for '...families [to] invite singles into their homes to participate in non-single life experiences' (Sell 1995, 324). Joint experiences facilitate mutually edifying education. Enabling single people to enjoy '...the company of children can help to fill one of the gaps in a single's life' (Wraight 1992, 98). Fifty-two percent of the questionnaire respondents (see *Chapter 6*) indicated that a desire to have children was an issue that they struggled with as single women. One lady noted, 'I've been very blessed to have people who've been friends since we were teenagers, who still include me in their family life and make me feel of value to them and to their children' (ID 2121/5, Appendix J). 'Single Christians should not be exempt from either the joys or the responsibilities that children bring. Singles are significant role models' (Clapp 1993, 107).

Singles

Many never-married women find themselves unexpectedly single at a particular age and/ or stage in life. Approximately sixty-two percent of all questionnaire respondents (see *Chapter 6*) indicated that they expected to be married by a certain age. A never-married woman may or may not realise that she was expecting to be married by a 'certain age' until it arrives, at which point she realises that she is unexpectedly single. If this happens, she '...can choose [her] attitude towards singleness: [she] can continue to feel a victim of circumstances, or [she] can

determine to accept it positively and discover what it can mean for the kingdom of heaven' (Wraight 1992, 28). Positive aspects of being single can be found if a person is prepared to look for them (Widder 2000, 71). They will be more easily found in a church that values and nurtures its singles and encourages them to explore their full potential in Christ.

Many people gain a sense of identity from their relationships, for instance a person can be defined as being someone else's 'other half.' 'Our self-awareness depends on relationships: if single people often feel they do not belong to anyone, ...they may struggle with wondering who they are' (Wraight 1992, 45). However, people should seek to find their identity in Christ rather than others.

All of us... single or married – need to have a sense of identify with Christ that doesn't depend on our relationships with other people. Otherwise, a marriage partner is no more than a distraction that masks our inner emptiness (Hsu 1998, 113).

A never-married Christian woman needs to know who she is, what her giftings are, the ministries to which she feels called etc. It can be helpful for a church to regularly run the Network course (Bugbee, Cousins and Hybels 1994) which helps all people, irrespective of their marital status, to discover their spiritual gifts and explore ways of using these gifts. It is worth noting that the Network course can encourage singles as it does not include 'celibacy' as a possible spiritual gift (see *Chapter 3*)! The church needs to be '...welcoming [a single person's] gifts and services in the church, providing them with meaningful tasks, and drawing them into the inner life of the church so that they may find fulfilment' (Arnold 1996, 20).

Never-married women need to feel a part of a Christian community. 'Being a Christian is not an individual journey; it is a group effort lived in community' (Hsu 1998, 140). Providing a place where never-marrieds feel connected is particularly important in urban churches where there is more likely to be a '...fragmentation of family networks. Families are more geographically scattered than in the past, thereby making companionship, support and comfort less available' (Coleman 1996, 49). Singles can experience a sense of loss if they are not close to their family, a connected Christian community can help to ease this loss. Irrespective of marital status, '...we should all experience the blessings that flow from humans living in community with others' (Payne 1994, 49).

Chapter 9

Possible Australian Approaches to Singles' Ministries

A separate ministry?

In contemplating what a church can do in order to provide a more meaningful and welcoming place for singles to join with marrieds in Christian community, it is interesting to consider whether or not it should run a separate 'singles' ministry.' There are various opinions for and against the idea of a separate singles ministry within the church. One argument against having a separate ministry is that it further segregates marrieds and singles (Whelchel 2001, 103). Some believe that a separate singles' ministry '...only accentuates their "strangeness" within their Christian family and really is counter-productive from the point of view of developing a genuine Christian life-style for the whole congregation' (Burk 1977, 80). One questionnaire respondent commented;

Definitely do NOT want to be segregated (ie Bible Studies or social activities) - a) we can all learn from the situations of others whatever their circumstances are, b) you can meet others through married couples (!!!!), c) I feel it creates almost a 'them' and 'us' situation – rightly or wrongly. I would feel as though I was 'stuck' in the single tag until 'promoted' to marriage status (ID 2065/1, Appendix G).

However, a significant reason that a separate singles ministry seems strange and alienating is because there is a stigma attached to being single. As previously mentioned (in *Chapter 8*), stigmatism needs to be broken. There should be nothing shameful about having a singles' ministry at a local church.

'Groups that choose to use the name or concept of singleness in their titles feel this is important in overcoming the idea that there is something "abnormal" about singleness; they point to parallel activities for youth, men, and women that clearly delineate the target population' (Collier-Slone 1993, 65).

A single's group is often perceived as being something that people attend because they have a problem with their singleness. However other separate ministries are perceived to be good, rather than segregating, because they seek to further enrich people's lives. For instance, it is hoped that the lives of young people will be enriched by attending a youth group. It is equally hoped that the lives of mothers will be enriched by a mothers group. Hopefully the lives of single people can be enhanced by a single's group.

If a separate singles ministry is created ‘...the program must be broad enough and the group attractive enough to convince singles to come once and then return for more’ (Johnson 1982, 21). Sometimes you need a combination of approaches, for instance some groups and events will specifically target singles as a separate group, and other events may focus on something of particular interest to singles, but will be open to both marrieds and singles. These include, groups open only to singles, such as a Bible study group, and church and evangelistic activities, such as social events and seminar series’. A single’s program should include ‘[s]piritual, emotional, intellectual, physical, [and] social ...aspects...’ (Collier-Slone 1993, 69).

The singles in the church need to be consulted regarding the ministry. ‘

We often assume that we understand what it is like to be single, and based on our unchecked assumptions, we set out to form a ministry to those who are unmarried. In doing so, we often miss what is important’ (Langberg 1996, 13).

Singles should be given ‘...a great deal of freedom in developing the groupings and topics of interest to them’ (Holmes 1996b, 23). Singles’ ministries should include ongoing feedback of its participants in order to ensure that it is meeting its objectives (Johnson 1982, 47). ‘When programs are developed on the basis of data collected from participants, they are more likely to be diverse and interesting’ (Johnson 1982, 52).

Leadership

‘With single adults, their sense of ownership of the ministry is essential’ (Holmes 1996b, 23). This does not mean that a single person has to head up any singles ministry at a church. Only twenty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they would appreciate having a single person on their ministry team. ‘It is important to note that singleness alone is not a sufficient credential for [the] leadership [of a singles’ ministry]’ (Collier-Slone 1993, 60). The leader simply needs to continually seek to know, understand and relate to singles. It can be helpful for a leader to establish a single’s task force to assist with determining the direction of the ministry.

If a church decides that it wants to employ someone either full-time or part-time as a single’s leader, ‘...it is preferable that [their] position... not be combined with youth ministry or some other configuration that would limit the work’ (Collier-Slone 1993, 61). Such a grouping could assign a stigma to the group by unintentional association. For instance, ‘[i]n circles where marriage seems to be the rite of passage into adulthood, singles are perceived as

developmentally challenged' (Hsu 1998, 21). A mindset such as this could be further encouraged in a local church if the person leading the singles' ministry was also the youth pastor.

Singles' ministries aimed at pairing off singles

It is important that single's events do not have an emphasis on needing to find a partner. This only reinforces the idea that singleness is an inferior state to marriage. Clinebell (1977, 109) suggests that '[i]f your aim is to exchange your singleness for marriage, a group may increase the possibilities of developing a good relationship.' The writer considers this to be quite infuriating and insulting. Opinions such as this contribute to the negative stigma often attached to singles' ministries. 'Frankly, most churches treat their singles ministries as little more than sanctified substitutes for singles bars. They see singles as peripheral to the core or central members, who belong to families' (Clapp 1993, 89). A few questionnaire respondents commented on their irritation with single's groups that seemed to desire the pairing off of its members. One lady said, 'most singles groups I've heard of, end up husband/ wife hunting groups and I think that's pretty demoralising for all concerned' (ID 2121/5, Appendix J). The aim of singles' ministries should be to support, encourage, celebrate and further enrich the lives of single people on every level (including spiritual and emotional). Events '...like mountain biking, where the emphasis was not on meeting people but on enjoying an event with other people' would nurture a healthier singles' ministry (Albaum 1991, 87).

Evangelistic opportunity

There is not a standard singles' ministry program that can be carried across every church. It is important that each church knows and understands the singles within its congregation in order to identify their needs. 'Knowing the prevailing issues of the target population is critical to the success of any program' (Collier-Slone 1993, 66). As mentioned earlier, it is important that singles within the church establish their identity in Christ. 'If Christ is not sufficient to meet our needs as singles, how can we share with others that He can meet *their* needs?' (Whelchel 2001, 8).

Once the needs of those within a congregation have been identified, the needs of singles in the local community can be investigated. Each church should '...research ...the number of singles and existing ministries for them in the community' (Johnson 1982, 21). Any areas of

commonality between the singles within the church and the wider community should be explored in order to identify possible evangelistic opportunities. As reported in *Section A*, recent ABS results reveal that nearly half of the Australian population aged 15 and over are single. 'Perhaps no other segment of the church has better potential for impacting the world for Christ than single adults' (Koons & Anthony 1991, 194).

Albaum (1991, 84 – 88) believes that singles will make the greatest impact on the world for Christ by being primarily outward focused. That is, programs should be built to meet the needs of singles primarily in the local community and/ or secondarily, in the church. 'Christian singles... must shed their cloistered mentality and develop programs that involves them in service projects in their own communities and overseas' (Koons & Anthony 1991, 195). Outward-focused ministries are better for group and church growth as they '...[find] a way to touch the community at large and bring people into the church' (Albaum 1991, 86). However, inward focused ministries fail to be able to sustain themselves over a long period of time.

A singles' ministry with an evangelistic heart will benefit itself, the church and the local community. 'The urban church must think of creative ways to impact a society full of individuals in non-traditional family units' (Holmes 1996a, 5). An effective singles' ministry uses a variety of creative methods to reach out to single people in the community and eventually lead them to Christ (Albaum 1991, 88). '...[W]e can offer a space where people are encouraged to disarm themselves, to lay aside their occupations and preoccupations and to listen with attention and care to the voices speaking in their own centre' (Nouwen 1986, 76). A healthy Christian singles ministry can offer singles who feel alienated in a family orientated society a safe haven in which they can feel accepted and affirmed.

Possible evangelistic events include the running of social activities of interest to non-Christians, for instance, those '...planned around holidays, such as February 14 dinner and movies' where romance is not allowed (Collier-Slone 1993, 22)! Albaum (1991, 84 – 88) refers to such approaches as providing non-Christians with a 'side-door' through which they can enter the church. In other words, it is a non-threatening way to include non-Christians in '...informal, church-sponsored social events' (Holmes 1996b, 22).

Educational events, such as '...seminars and classes can focus on their particular transitions and tasks' (Sell 1995, 324). For instance, a church could run an evangelistic seminar series centred around singleness and loneliness. The first seminar would cover, 'singleness,

loneliness and change/ transition.’ ‘...[T]he loneliest periods for more people occurred at times of major life changes, such as a new job, a relationship break-up, or moving away from home’ (Sturt 1996, 11). The second seminar would cover, ‘singleness, loneliness and intimacy.’ ‘...[T]he experience of real intimacy in a person’s life is the key to prevention of loneliness. The less intimacy, the more loneliness a person is likely to experience’ (Sturt 1996, 12). The third seminar would cover ‘singleness, loneliness and spirituality.’

...[A]lthough we need close one-to-one friendships, we also need an intimate relationship with Jesus; ...certain love-needs can be met only in the divine embrace; ...loneliness is the friend in disguise who throws us into the arms of Christ (Huggett 1985, 150).

The third seminar would include a brief, culturally relevant, presentation of the gospel and provide an opportunity for people to respond (both verbally and on a seminar evaluation form). Respondents would be followed up individually and invited to a small group (when they are ready).

‘...[M]any successful singles ministries incorporate an explicitly educational thrust’ (Landgraf 1982, 62). However, the writer believes that it is important to incorporate both education and social activities. However, social activities do not need to be formally organised. For instance, they might be a natural result of a meeting of like-minded people at a seminar. For this (and other) reasons, it can be good to include times for the formation of small discussion groups about issues being raised within seminars. If the seminar is an evangelistic event, it would be ideal to ensure that there were Christian representatives in every small group. This could only be guaranteed by ensuring, firstly that regular church attendees would be at the meeting as well as their non-Christian friends or locals. Secondly, that church attendees had an attitude that caused them to spread themselves out amongst the group, rather than all sitting together in one corner of the room.

It is beneficial for the church and community if singles are intentionally involved in incarnational ministries. This can be done by initially forming single’s bible study groups consisting of people of a similar ‘...age who have common interests: art, music, literature, Bible study, language study...’ (Andrews 1972, 131). Such groups can then select a secular club that appeals to one of their common interests. For instance, the group might join a local book reading club (provided the bible study group does not outnumber the other club members!). ‘No Singles ministry will

fulfil its potential unless members are actively involved in relationships with unchurched singles' (Holmes 1996b, 21).

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 1982, 20). 'After the various needs of both side- and front-door singles are addressed, the church can then focus on the next concern: getting side-door singles committed to Christ and integrated into church life' (Albaum 1991, 88).

In cases where there are not many singles in a church '...it may be most economical and effective to sponsor joint programs' (Johnson 1982, 92). This can involve joint singles ministries with other churches, and singles ministries that are open to married people. It is good to provide singles with an attractive evangelistic mission, such as becoming members of a local indoor rock climbing centre with a desire to be ambassadors for Christ in that environment. Choosing an activity that may primarily be attractive to singles, but is also opened to marrieds 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 a married/ single agent of Christ.

Chapter 10

Loneliness

Approximately seventy-five percent of the questionnaire respondents (see *Chapter 6*) said that loneliness was a significant struggle for them as single women. As a result, the remainder of this thesis will focus on singleness and loneliness.

'Loneliness is one of the most universal sources of human suffering today' (Nouwen 1986, 25). Singleness '...does not inevitably mean being lonely' (Britton 1982, 57). Nor does marriage guarantee that one does not feel lonely. Many singles mistakenly think that their loneliness would be solved if they got married. 'Evangelical Christians have traditionally viewed marriage as the cure for aloneness' (Hsu 1998, 131).

Irrespective of marital status, '...loneliness begins when you receive from other people in your social network less than what you expect from them' (Sturt 1996, 8). This includes what you need and want from these people at both conscious and sub-conscious levels. Loneliness '...is a signal that we need something from the outside, be it comfort, support, or empathy. It keeps us from starving emotionally. God has designed us to respond to that signal' (Cloud & Townsend 2000, 123).

It is important to make a distinction between being alone and feeling lonely. They '...are not necessarily synonymous: it is equally possible to be quite content with your own company, or devastatingly lonely, and lost in a crowd' (Wraight 1992, 68). Whether a person feels content or alone will depend not on their situation but on their response to that situation (Muto 1985, 40).

Some people respond to their feelings of loneliness by trying to crowd them out or suppress them. 'Most of us work hard at papering over the crack caused by loneliness. We over-work.... We flit from one superficial social engagement to another.... We clutter ourselves with spiritual paraphernalia and rush...' (Huggett 1985, 143). It is important that the church does not encourage or abuse this by overworking its never-marrieds to the point of burn-out. Some never-marrieds can '...become so used to [the] state of anesthesia [induced by overworking], that [they] panic when there is nothing or nobody left to distract [them]' (Nouwen 1986, 27).

'Instead of running away from our loneliness and trying to forget or deny it, we have to protect it and turn it into a fruitful solitude' (Nouwen 1986, 34). Solitude is a choice to be alone in order to reconnect with self and God (Sturt 1996, 19). 'In solitude I bring my whole being – physical, emotional, spiritual – before God and ask Him for the grace I need to live my single calling joyfully' (Muto 1985, 41). In this way it '...can bring healing and restoration' (Payne 1994, 88).

However it is important that never-married Christian women do not withdraw too much. 'It's not good to be alone too much; you can become too introspective' (Whelchel 2001, 56). 'No man [or woman] is an island, entire of itself; every man [or woman] is a piece of the continent, a part of the main' (Donne 1624). As mentioned previously (in *Chapter 8*) never-marrieds need to be connected to a Christian community.

It is important for a never-married Christian woman to '...[establish] a supportive extended family – a network of friends with similar concerns' (Koons & Anthony 1991, 161). Within that network, she needs to have a few friends with who she is particularly intimate. It is the quality of relationships, rather than the quantity that determines a persons level of '[h]appiness and satisfaction...' (Staples 1982, 18). 'Whether we recognise it or not, within each of us there is a powerful longing to create a really deep relationship with at least one other person' (Huggett 1985, 17).

Some never-marrieds believe that the intimacy they crave can only be experienced in a marriage relationship. However, a never-married woman is unlikely to find '...one person [who] can meet all of [her] needs' (Wright 1997, 11). Nor is she likely to find healthy intimacy in a marriage relationship if she cannot experience it in her platonic friendships. Never-married women need to be taught and encouraged to form healthy intimate relationships with other Christian women – both married and single. For instance, the church should strongly encourage the establishment of healthy prayer partnerships that nurture intimacy and accountability.

Unfortunately, however, the church has '...often given singles the message that they are not just single in reference to the state of marriage, but that they are alone, without companionship, without accompaniment' (Langberg 1996, 15). This could be a contributing factor to the problem of loneliness experienced by many singles. The church needs to provide an alternative that will help people to form healthy, intimate relationships with God, self, and others. A healthy, intimate relationship '...means openness, vulnerability, availability and confession' (Nouwen 1969, 33).

Relationships of this calibre allow never-marrieds to grow as a result of their sense of worth, significance and validation (Smoke 2000, 35).

The most important relationship for never-married women to work on is their relationship with God. Jesus modelled the need that all people have to develop an intimate relationship with God. Jesus knew what it was like to be alone both physically and spiritually (Sturt 1996, 17). 'Jesus often withdrew to a solitary place to be away from people and spend time alone with his Father' (Sturt 1996, 20). His prayers teach and encourage complete transparency before God. He '...poured out his soul to God. He prayed. He cried. He felt alone. In the midst of his pain, Jesus knew God was with him' (Coleman 1996, 52). Never-married women need to be encouraged to do the same. '...[T]here is the incredible grace of opportunity ...in ...solitude to encounter the mysterious and all-encompassing relationship with God, which fills the emptiness, feeds the hunger, heals the fear, as no earthly relationship can' (Collier-Slone 1993, 80).

'Primary loneliness entails the loss of a faith-friendship with God' (Muto 1985, 153). '...[S]econdary loneliness is due to withdrawal from our neighbours, associates, friends and family' (Muto 1985, 153). It is important for singles to ensure that God is their '...first priority so that [they] are not trying to get God needs met by a relationship with a person' (Cloud & Townsend 2000, 73). A person's relationship with God is '...a relationship that no human bond can ever equal for deep and total satisfaction' (Andrews 1972, 158). All too often we focus on the need to have Christ at the centre of a Christian marriage but not to have Christ at the centre of a person's singleness. Instead people focus on how to find a partner and move them into the centre of their, or their friend's life! 'Fulfilment comes when we are filled with the fullness of God, filled with the Spirit, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus...' (Whelchel 2001, 65).

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to help Christian churches within Australia, notably Baptist churches in Sydney, to lead the way in assisting singles, particularly never-married women without children, to live fully empowered, joyous lives for Christ. Currently society and the church in general seem to marginalise singles and elevate romantic 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.

The church needs to employ a top-down approach to start demythologising unhelpful stereotypes, stabilising a healthy view of singleness, nurturing good relations between marrieds and singles, and enriching the lives of singles both within, and outside of the church. In order to do this, local churches need to work at creating a welcoming environment for singles in which they can explore their full potential in Christ. This can primarily be done by using a more inclusive approach to its language, in sermons, announcements and bulletins etceteras, and ministries, including bible study groups, events, and seminars. 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.

Since nearly half of the Australian population is single, ministries targeting singles should be of prime interest to the church. It provides local congregations with an exciting challenge and an evangelistic opportunity. If embraced by a local congregation, not only will the lives of their singles be enriched, but the lives of marrieds will also be enhanced through the blessings of improved community and increased understanding and respect. Additionally, more lost people will be won for Christ thanks to the movement of God's Spirit through this kingdom advancing opportunity.