



## Single adults: Beyond the myths

By Father Joseph Kenna  
NC News Service

As I paged through a photo album published for the centennial of a rural parish I had served in, I was struck by the fact that so many people there were single.

Widows, widowers, lots of young adults, divorced men and women, some parishioners who chose never to marry: Single people were almost a majority.

The statistical fact is that more than 40 percent of adults over 18 are single.

Yet in parishes many singles say they feel like exceptions.

Not long ago, a bright young computer technician asked my advice.

"Father," he said, "I work 40 hours a week. I go home to an apartment by myself. I cook my own food. I am a solo at the movies. And I've got to admit I'm pretty happy. Why is it the loneliest time of my week is when I go to Mass on Sunday? It seems like everything is geared to mom, dad and the kids. Where do I fit in?"

Can we clear up some misconceptions about single adults? Here are a few typical attitudes one hears, along with my response to them:

1. "Why all this talk about singles? Shouldn't our parish be supporting family life?"

Everybody belongs to a family, though some persons don't have a family living with them. Family life is important to single people.

Being single and being married are not in competition. The problem comes when parishes focus on married persons in such a way that single people seem to become invisible.

2. "Responding to single adults means adding new programs to an already burdened parish staff."

Being sensitive to single people

does not necessarily entail a lot of programming. It is an inaccurate stereotype to think of single people as hurting or needing more than others. They are a valuable and generally untapped resource for a parish community.

3. "There is something wrong with a person who is not married."

This is the most difficult misconception to deal with because it is the least articulated and may be the most felt. Single persons are sensitive to the silence of a community that constantly affirms other vocations.

Like all prejudices, this one cannot be dismissed easily. Maybe the best remedy is to constantly remind ourselves that Jesus was single.

4. "I have nothing in common with single people. Why should I

care?"

We can rejoice that the Catholic community embraces the rainbow of human experience since everyone gains from the richness of diverse experiences of life.

Most persons have a single person in the family. My mother is a widow. Now in her late 70s, she drives her car wherever she wishes, exercises regularly at the local community college and is on a continual round of pinochle parties.

She is near family members, but I believe that a real rock of her mental and spiritual strengths is the parish. It has a club for mature adults (she doesn't consider herself "old") which takes bus trips all over the state.

The parish leadership has a real sensitivity toward older singles.

She has a feeling of being loved and needed in the parish. This helps her deal with the loneliness of losing her husband of more than 50 years. She doesn't add a lot to the ecumenical dialogue program with a local Lutheran church, but her presence at the meetings is important.

There are no "typical" single people. But the young computer technician and my mother have something important in common: They are single Catholics with special needs and special gifts for the whole community.

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By Father John Castelot  
NC News Service

The very first Christians were like one another in many ways. Yet, in spite of all that unified them, Jesus' followers remained individuals: old and young, single and married, fairly well-to-do and poor, good and not so good.

Barnabas, apparently single and financially independent, "sold a farm that he owned and made a donation of the money, laying it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37).

Ananias "likewise sold a piece of property. With the connivance of his wife he put aside a part of the proceeds for himself; the rest he took and laid at the feet of the apostles" (Acts 5:1-2).

Though different from each other, there was a certain homogeneity among members of the earliest Christian community.

But gradually the church reached out to embrace many different kinds of people.

The first break came with the conversion of Jews who had lived outside of Palestine, spoke Greek, were quite at home in Greek culture and entertained somewhat liberal views about Judaism. Their entrance into the community caused friction: They were outsiders.

When the widows in this group later complained that they were being neglected in favor of the native Jewish-Christian widows, a group of their own men were selected to take part in distributing the common fund.

As a result, new personalities emerged, notably Stephen. His outspoken views so enraged some of Jerusalem's people that they stoned him to death. His martyrdom, however, had providential results.

Christians like him fled the scene and brought the Good News with them. An especially influential group went to the provincial capital, Antioch in Syria, where they evangelized not only Jews but gentiles.

The church was on the brink of becoming cosmopolitan and more diverse.

From Antioch, Paul set out on his mission ventures, establishing communities as far west as Greece.

The average community then was not unlike a modern parish, although considerably smaller. Sometimes diversity of status among the people caused problems, as at Corinth, where affluent members snubbed their less fortunate brothers and sisters in the act of celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Paul lost no time correcting that

## A mix of personalities

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