

# Being Alone Shouldn't be Lonely: the Church and Singles

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There's an old cartoon that shows a minister walking into the church office. He is on crutches with bandages, bruises, and braces all over his body. In the foreground the parish administrator is asking him: "So how did the singles group take your suggestion that they start calling themselves The Leftovers?"

Leftovers. That's a pretty accurate way to describe what it's like living as a single. When I say leftovers, I'm not talking leftovers in the wonderful, tasty, beef-stew-reheated-from-the-day-before sense of the word. I mean the odd sock, assorted mismatched screws, and not-sure-where-it-came-from computer cord sense of the word.

Essentially, as singles, particularly as we get older, we find that the world and the Church just don't know what to do with us. This is especially true in the Church where we like to create affinity groups. We have a real tendency to divide everything up by age or common interest. We have youth groups, young adult, young married, men's groups, and women's groups. You name

it. If we can create a group out of it, we will.


This is what happens to singles. We're turned into a group. One group. Because all singles are the same. Our dominant trait is our singleness. Apparently, I at 53 have more in common with a single who is 22, than a couple who are both 22 will have in common with a single who is 22.

Developing and being in relationships (whether romantic or not) takes time and effort. Yet, single people both inside and outside the Church are often treated as having more time to devote to their workplace or Church because they are single, based on Paul's 1 Corinthians 7 exhortations that people should maintain their single status so that they will be better able to serve God and God's people. One would almost think, at times, that the best reason for being in a relationship is to avoid having to do the work of the Church.

We do allow for the possibility that some people may have been especially called to remain single (and sexless), and the Church has long created orders that allow singles to minister (nuns and monks). But these orders keep them from other singles, particularly of the opposite sex (while pretending that same-sex attraction doesn't exist).

There's also the notion that being part of a couple is the desire of every single person. Invitations to join families often turn out to be opportunities for the single person to get to know one of their friends, who – surprise, surprise – just happens to be single.



The Church reflects the greater society's need to see everyone paired off. That's why shows such as *The Bachelor* or *Love Island* continue to flourish. They feed this misconception that there is someone out there for everyone. We simply have to keep looking until we find that one special person.



## What If I Got Hit By A Bus?

(or not able to communicate with my family?)

Presented by Margaret Meush  
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On top of these specific reasons for remaining single, we don't allow for the possibility that maybe some people are just better off living on their own. Relationships require intimacy in all forms. I know for myself as I grow older, it becomes harder to achieve such intimacy. Even living with a roommate is more difficult because, unless you have commonality, the only thing likely holding that relationship together may be the need to save money.

The Church has also fetishized the nuclear family. Our programs and outreach are still aimed at getting families into our communities. Yet, according to [“Census 2016: More Canadians than ever are living alone, and other take-aways”](#) in *The Globe and Mail*, people living on their own have gone from being about seven percent of the Canadian population in the early 1950s to being almost four times that amount in 2016. In fact, single-adult households are now the most common family unit, just edging out families with two adults with children and families of two adults, with no children.

Where do we start to change this? First and foremost, we need to keep reminding ourselves that we are a body. Not a body in the sense of a collection of individuals, but parts of a living, breathing, body. When Paul speaks of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, he speaks of a human body, where all parts are connected with each other. A hand that is cut off from the body ceases to function as a hand, and the body is forced to compensate, putting more pressure on other parts of the body.

Like most analogies, this falls down because, when the physical body loses a part, it can't be replaced. However, when a part of the body is injured, the act of compensation may make it easier for the injured part to heal and become even stronger than it was before, in the end making the whole body stronger.

One thing that we could do as a Church to invite singles in more is to remember that we follow the lead of Jesus and not Emily Post. Given that there are so many more single females than males, more dinner parties that involve couples could round out their numbers

with two single women rather than finding a man and a woman.

The Church should also be inviting singles into greater leadership. I'm grateful that the Anglican Church of Canada doesn't view my singleness as something that disqualifies me from being a priest. However, senior parish leadership too often places emphasis on leaders who are married with families. This is one reason we can't break out of this notion that we should always be targeting families. A good question for a newcomer ministry in a parish could be: Does this ministry make an effort to help singles integrate with couples and families in this parish?

Earlier I mentioned the need for some measure of commonality. This is something we often forget. We as the Church have a commonality, and that is we are all called to live out the love of Christ to the world around us.

Our baptismal covenant calls us to such a life. The first part of that covenant is the Apostle's Creed, and the second part begins with the question:

**“Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”**

There is nothing in this question that suggests that it only relates to our intimate circle, but rather that it is something in which we all participate, no matter what our relationship status. Single, married, with children, without, we are all meant to be in relationship.



Donald McKenzie is the incumbent at St. Philip's Anglican Church. You can find his thoughts on food at his blog, [Dining with Donald](#).