

Singular Accomplishments

By Jonathan H. Stephenson
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Members and missionaries in the Lexington Kentucky Stake have found a formula for success in baptizing and friendshipping adults who are single.

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They are bright and talented. They are eager to learn, serve, and contribute to the work of the kingdom. They are our adult single converts, and they're joining the Church by the tens of thousands every year. Their numbers are evenly split between men and women, and they are primarily between the ages of 18 and 30. Each year they bring in a wonderful influx of faith and strength.

One place that has been particularly successful with adult singles is the Lexington Kentucky Stake. Nestled amid the rolling hills and horse farms of the beautiful Kentucky countryside is a stake whose full-time missionaries, stake and ward leaders, and members are dedicated to cooperatively helping each newly baptized person experience both a *social* and a *spiritual* conversion. Their success seems to come from:

1. A friendly boldness in speaking freely about the gospel to everyone;
2. A warm and welcoming atmosphere in the wards and branches;
3. Established, well-organized programs for single members.

Friendly Boldness

Because overall convert baptisms in the stake have increased significantly in recent years, so has the baptism of singles. "There is a real receptiveness in this area that cuts across race, gender, and marital status. The missionaries are very active finders, and we're seeing many more member referrals," says President Michael C. Cannon of the Kentucky Louisville Mission. A key factor in this increase has been an emphasis on the Lord's exhortation to "open your mouths" (**D&C 28:16; D&C 33:8-10**).

Elder Abraham Arnett, a missionary from Chandler, Arizona, explains: "In this mission we talk to absolutely everybody we possibly can. We look at every individual as a potential member of the Church, so we don't want to hold back. We tell people things about the Church that we hope will help make it more appealing to them. When we talk to singles we tell them, 'We have activities for singles. This is perfect for you.' "

President Cannon says, "That's been a great tradition in this mission—that the missionaries will preach everywhere and are able to be bold but not overbearing" (see **Alma 38:12**). As a result, many more adult singles are being invited to learn more about the Church.

Members are also using friendly boldness. Joann Maddox, a registered nurse and single mother, was first introduced to the Church as she was saying good-bye to a patient. The patient's wife asked her if she knew of the Church. In relating her experience, Joann says, "She also asked if I

would mind if the missionaries came by my house.” At first Joann rejected a visit by the missionaries, but then her heart was softened after her son was killed in a car accident. “That wonderful Mormon lady came by the hospital to visit and see if I was OK. She invited me over to her house, and we talked. The sister missionaries came, and I just loved them. I feel more at peace now, and I can go out and tell *everybody* what I have found.” In Lexington members and missionaries are inviting everyone to “come and see” (**John 1:39**).

Greatly facilitating this effort is how aware the members and missionaries are of the stake and ward activities for singles. “The missionaries told me about the activities for singles before I was baptized,” says Jennifer Columbia, an 18-year-old member of the Pioneer Ward who met the missionaries at the drive-through window of the fast-food restaurant where she works. “They said that a lot of people get together and do stuff, like a big family. I thought it sounded fun.” Recently baptized 21-year-old Kristy Adkins of the Richmond Ward was introduced at the activities for singles by a young single adult member she met while investigating the Church.

Sister Amanda Tippetts—a missionary from Afton, Wyoming, serving in Kentucky—says, “Our mission leaders are always encouraging us to invite our investigators to whatever Church activities might interest them.”

A Welcoming Spiritual Atmosphere

“The hardest part about joining the Church is the transition from old friends to new friends,” says Bobby Jones, a young single adult (YSA) convert from the Lexington First (YSA) Branch. When the missionaries took him to the singles branch, he felt the Spirit. He saw people his age bearing their testimonies. He was invited to the weekly family home evening meetings in the branch and met people who have become his friends. “This is one of the greatest blessings of being part of this Church,” Bobby says. “No matter where you go, you can find a new set of friends.”

Ben Auxier, a 46-year-old single adult and power industry employee, says that when he first came to church, “everybody was really friendly. The bishop was one of the first to greet me. I probably met 30 people. One of the hardest things for me to get used to was the children’s noise. But now they sit beside me, and I feel like I’ve got a home.”

Unmarried adult investigators can experience many different feelings on their first visits to church. Michelle Lee, a single mother, remembers her first visit: “At first I thought I wasn’t going to fit in, but that feeling went away quickly. When several youth spoke in sacrament meeting before leaving on their missions, I thought, *Those kids are the age of my kids*. It was heartbreaking. It was also quite emotional for me to listen to their fathers and mothers speak. I didn’t have a spouse, and I looked back on my life with a lot of regrets. I wished I’d had the Church when I was younger. But I was never made to feel out of place. When I’m sitting by myself, somebody with their whole family usually sits next to me. I shy away from situations that I feel are mostly for families, although everyone has helped make me feel very comfortable.”

A single mother of two small children, Angela Hardin of the Richmond Ward wondered during her first visit to church what others would think of her. “I’ve felt very welcome,” she happily relates. “When a bunch of young couples who all had one or two small children, like me, got together, I was the only single. At first I felt uncomfortable, but they welcomed me and those feelings died down. I’ve loved it!”

Elder Jeffrey Lloyd—a missionary from Kaysville, Utah, serving in Kentucky—reports that there are always at least two or three members who greet his investigators. “The attitude of the members is, ‘We love you, and we’re here for you. Just because you don’t have a husband or wife doesn’t mean you can’t be a part of this Church.’ ”

Programs for Single Members

“We’ve worked very hard on establishing a young single adult program and a single adult program,” says L. Paul Moeck, president of the Lexington Kentucky Stake. “There are three things that have really made it grow: (1) dedication—our leaders are very dedicated. They are at every activity and are spiritual ‘moms and dads’ to our singles; (2) consistency—we never cancel a scheduled activity, so people have come to depend on them; and (3) an emphasis on the Spirit. We want our singles to simply enjoy getting together to learn the gospel and feel the Spirit. When some decline to participate, saying, ‘I’m not interested in getting married right now,’ we say, ‘This is *not* a program for finding a spouse.’ We have a lot more people participating now.”

President Moeck adds, “Each month the mission sends us a disk with a list of all the baptisms. We take that information and give it to our leaders.” In this way stake and ward leaders with responsibility for single adults can also invite newly baptized singles to participate in their programs.

The Lexington Kentucky Stake offers three programs for adult singles: a young single adult branch, a stake single adult program, and an institute of religion. Gary Brown, president of the branch, maintains two lists, one of his branch members and one of every young single adult in the stake. “We send flyers about our activities to everyone on both lists,” he says. Brother Russell Southworth, a member of the stake high council, and his wife, Melody, help oversee the program for single adults over age 30. “Many of our singles are widowed or divorced. They want to fellowship with someone their age who has the same values,” says Melody. Her husband adds, “We hold a ‘Soup Session’ on the first Tuesday, a family home evening on the second Sunday, a potluck-fireside on the fourth Sunday, and an additional special activity each month. This way the singles and missionaries always know what to expect. We distribute an activity calendar booklet each year.”

The institute of religion program offers weekly scripture study classes primarily for young singles in meetinghouses and on several college campuses. Gus Lafontaine, a newly baptized student at Eastern Kentucky University, looks forward to his opportunity to “talk about the Book of Mormon and the scriptures” with young people his age. Working with local Church Educational System leaders, President Moeck is strengthening the institute program by expanding class offerings, organizing an institute student council, and encouraging participation in institute fireside broadcasts, conferences, and social and service activities.

Conventional Wards and Single Converts

The leaders and members of the conventional wards also place a high priority on fellowshipping new converts, with special attention to the singles. “All converts require ‘special handling,’ ” says Bishop Sam Thomas of the Bluegrass Ward. “When a family joins, they at least have each other for support, but when a single person joins, the ward must step in and provide that essential support. I also regularly meet with the president of the singles branch and the Southworths to review the needs of the singles in my ward.” He adds, “We don’t have any ‘couples-only’

activities. Everyone is invited to every activity.”

Following Church guidelines, Bishop Mark Stevens of the Richmond Ward has organized a single members committee in his ward (see *Church Handbook of Instructions, Books 1 and 2* [1998], 13, 61, 109-12, 316, 319). “One of our biggest challenges is keeping our committee staffed with singles representatives,” he says. “We post flyers on the bulletin board and list information about the singles activities in our Sunday meeting programs. Our ward mission leader is also organized and helpful with our adult single converts.”

A Challenge and an Opportunity

The harvest of souls into the restored gospel of Jesus Christ continues to grow, and unmarried adults are a significant part of that harvest. They can be a great strength to the kingdom of God. When missionaries and members work together with friendly boldness to develop a welcoming spiritual atmosphere and effective programs for single members, this part of the harvest will be abundant.

No One Should Be Ignored



Single adults “often feel cut off from the mainstream of Mormon family life. They especially need to be part of a gospel kindred family, where blessings can be obtained from worthy priesthood bearers and role models can be found in quorum brotherhood and Relief Society sisterhood. Families in the ward can reach out and share loving concern. Within the Lord’s design, no one should be ignored. We are all members of the body of Christ.”—**Elder J. Richard Clarke of the Seventy, “Our Kindred Family—Expression of Eternal Love,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 61.**

Gospel topics: single members, missionary work, conversion, fellowshipping

[photos] Photography by Jonathan H. Stephenson, except as noted

[photo] Above: The Richmond Ward single members committee meets regularly to discuss and implement plans to meet the needs of investigators, new converts, and other ward members who are single.

[photo] Top right: Joann Maddox, a registered nurse and single mother, says the members of her ward “treat me like I’m one of their family. They’ve been wonderful.”

[photo] Bottom right: Bobby Jones first attended Church at the singles branch, where he soon made friends who helped him learn about the Church.

[photo] Below: Unmarried adults are a significant part of the harvest of souls in the Lexington Kentucky Stake. (Photo illustration by Mark G. Budd.)

Church Publications (HTML)

[photo] The stake single members committee sponsors a monthly potluck dinner and fireside, making it easier for members to know what they are inviting their friends to attend. (Photo by Russell Southworth.)

[photos] Members of the stake single members committee, led by President L. Paul Moeck (second from right), discuss ways to work closely with full-time missionaries. (Photo by Russell Southworth.)

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