

Welcoming single people at Christmas



Jackie Elton, from Single Friendly Church Network, looks at how we can make sure everyone is included at Christmas.

Christmas can be the hardest time of year for single people. That's what we discovered when Single Friendly Church Network ran a survey on single people's experiences of church at Christmas. 70% of respondents said that they struggled with at least some aspects of the festive season.

Like many single people, I start to worry at the end of summer about how I will spend Christmas. Will I be with family? Or should I invite friends around or make plans to go away on my own? I once made a short video about this for the Single Friendly Church Network, and it was one of the most watched we ever did! But it's a difficult subject for most people to talk about.

How might we make Christmas a joyful and inclusive experience for everyone?

Find out who might be on their own

Lots of people don't have someone to spend Christmas with – and it may not be immediately obvious. Some may have plans but need help with transport to church. The key to supporting them is knowing their stories and asking what they need.

Welcome others in

Many single people feel that 'church family' doesn't apply to Christmas. Those without relatives or living far from family and friends can feel extremely isolated. Single parents without a support system can feel overwhelmed, trying to make Christmas happen all by themselves.

Is it right that, after church at Christmas, so many disappear into their family unit, leaving others on their own? Could you invite someone to join you for one of your celebrations or activities? Invitations don't have to be for Christmas Day itself – it could be evening drinks or a Boxing Day walk. When we look beyond our own cosy gatherings, we can make Christmas a time of warmth and welcome.

Make church services single friendly

For some, Christmas can be a painful season. Some single people find the focus on families and children difficult. Others feel alone in church when surrounded by gatherings of extended families. For those recently widowed, their first Christmas without their spouse can be empty and daunting. It's important to acknowledge the pain of Christmas in the talk and prayers offered. Blue Christmas services – providing a space for reflection, remembrance, and comfort – are growing in popularity for those who find the season hard.

Consider taking different approaches for different events, e.g. a family approach for a crib service, but consider a broader, more spiritual focus for midnight Communion or carol services.

Make a special effort to warmly welcome those attending Christmas services on their own. Some people only come to church at Christmas – so it's a great opportunity to show visitors the love and care that the Church can offer. This sense of community and belonging could make all the difference in drawing people back throughout the year.

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Encourage social activities over the Christmas and New Year Period

Often people will have plans for Christmas Day, but the week between Christmas and New Year can be a very lonely time. Activities don't have to be organised by church leadership – empower those who want social opportunities to be part of the solution. Encourage meetups like a walk, games night or coffee morning with mince pies. Invite someone you know who may be feeling isolated or pay them a visit. It could mean so much.

Remember the true meaning of Christmas

Secular Christmas celebrations often focus on families, but that shouldn't be what churches do. Jesus was born for everyone, including the stranger, the lonely and the hurting. Telling the stories of Anna and Simeon, who found joy in encountering the baby Jesus, or the shepherds who were welcomed into the mystery of Jesus' birth, offers a broader perspective. If you think about it – at the first Christmas that little family unit were open to visits from many different types of people from outside.

Being single friendly isn't just for Christmas

UK society is changing. 40% of adults are single and this is increasing in every age group. But single people often report feeling unwelcome in church. Single Friendly Church Network was born out of research commissioned by Christian Connection [WEB](#), where over 3,000 single Christians shared their experiences. Many felt excluded, hurt, and isolated, to the point that some had left church altogether. We are here to help churches change that situation – and become places where single people feel welcomed and valued.

As an adult single person, I've always been aware that people often make assumptions and judgments and regard single people as objects of pity. When I saw the research, I began to feel that things must change. I hope that we can truly start to make a difference both for individual single Christians and to how churches look and feel.

Single Friendly Church Network encourages all churches to welcome and value single people at every stage of life. For more ideas and resources at Christmas and all-year round, visit www.singlefriendlychurch.com

 Listen to Melanie Cave interview Jackie Elton on the Roots for Churches podcast: rootsforchurches.podbean.com