

# Finding the Right Church

## and The Importance of Christian Singles Ministries

Many of you may know my husband, Dr. Marc Sommer, as he is well known within the CCA community. As a new member of the Auxiliary, I was flattered when asked to write an article for the Journal; however, I was hesitant to add it to my to-do list, as I'm sure many of you have been to add Christ's work to your daily calendar. I realized upon further consideration that, as a follower of Christ, it was imperative that I take the time to acknowledge Him in my life, and this privilege was a rare opportunity I could not pass up. That's how I got here: sitting at my desk, eating my lunch amidst patient files and assorted HMO paperwork, writing this article, hoping to set an example for those of you who wish the day had thirty hours so you could find the time to do God's work.

Marc and I were married on July 1, 2006 after knowing each other for a little over a year. He and I had been single for 18 and 14 years, respectively. The Lord's blessings upon our union began early when "his girls," two dogs named Bonnie and Peanut, and my daughter, Mili—who was 24 years old at the time—hit it off without a hitch.

Having been single for so many years, I have experienced first hand the challenges and loneliness of being a single, working, Christian mother. I went from

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church to church searching for a singles' small group. Many churches didn't have such groups, and the ones that did catered to much younger or much older folks. So I kept searching, focusing on God's promise that those who sought would receive.

All the while I was fortunate to have many mar-

ried Christian friends who never forgot their single friend. They religiously invited Mili and me to join their families during the holidays and included us in family celebrations. My parents and extended family live far away in distant India. These Christian families became our extended family here in the United States. They encouraged me to visit their churches and prayed for me to find the right church that would meet my special needs as a single mother. I am grateful to them for their fellowship and support during the times I wanted to quit my search for the "perfect fit" and settle for a church that met most of my needs - giving up the dream of a strong church with a thriving singles ministry.

During my search, I had been studying the Bible on my own and even started my own monthly Women's Friendship Group, which was comprised of professional Christian women, both married and single, who yearned for the fellowship of other women. We prayed together and for one another, kept each other accountable to our goals, and always picked up the phone if one of our sisters in Christ was in need. With their help, I decided to stay single and accept that status as God's plan for my life. My daughter was finishing college and making plans to move closer to begin her adult life in New York City. I was at peace.

Christmas 2004 saw the dawn of a new era for me. Following Bible study at a friend's home, the group prayed for me to find the right church and a suitable partner should that be in accordance to God's plan for me. This took place the day before a Christian couple I knew from one of the churches I had attended some years back recommended Jacksonville Chapel in Lincoln Park, New Jersey to me. Sensing my reluctance, this couple drove forty miles out of their way to accompany me to Jacksonville Chapel.

This article is a testament to the power of prayer.

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The Lord answered my prayer for the right church. The first Sunday in 2005, with my friends seated in the pew beside me, on my first visit to Jacksonville Chapel, I saw that they had a singles' ministry. It was led by a Dr. Marc Sommer. I called the listed number later that day and registered to attend the following week. It was there that I met my husband - my Christian life partner.

I didn't know this until recently, but just two weeks before I attended my first singles' ministry Bible Study at Jacksonville Chapel, Marc had said a similar prayer for himself. After almost two decades of being single, he was ready to open his heart to love again if the Lord had prepared a suitable woman for him. He was willing to try again.

Not only had the Lord answered my prayer for a home church, He had answered our prayer for His chosen life partner in each of our lives. I am writing this article to make you aware that forty percent of Christians are single, and many of them do not have a home church. These single Christians should not be shunned or ignored; they need the support of their married friends and a place to meet and commiserate with other singles. Our churches have a surplus of groups for MOPS, married couples and families, men's groups, women's groups, and teen groups, but there is a dearth of outlets for singles.

If you take nothing away from this article, take away this action plan: extend your friendship to singles in your churches, especially divorced or widowed singles, and older singles. Invite your single friends to dinner and open up your home if you feel comfortable sharing a family celebration with them. Keep them in your prayers, and let them know that you think of them often. If your church does not have a singles' ministry, pray that God will find a few willing singles to start a group.

God calls us to be inclusive: to support and encourage the lonely, the homeless, and widowed. Marc and I are available to answer any questions you may have and to offer suggestions. After all, he was the singles director at our church for three years before answering God's call to be my husband. We are living proof that you can find love at church despite past disappointments.

Dr. Susheela Thomas is a pediatrician and joined the CCA Auxiliary in 2006. She and her husband, Dr. Marc Sommer, live in Kinnelon, New Jersey.