In response, churches are seizing the opportunity to reach out to this segment of society. This report provides:

- A brief look at the lives of two single-parent families
- Statistics offering a snapshot of single-parent family trends
- Profiles of churches engaged in innovative single-parent ministry
- A vision for single-parent ministry as a vehicle for outreach and evangelism
- An introduction to a new single-parenting curriculum designed specifically for churches

**The challenge**
Increasing numbers of single parents are turning to churches for help. Without an effective strategy, church leaders are not prepared to handle the level of ongoing care, guidance and practical help single parents need.

**The opportunity**
Single parents often are spiritually hungry because of the pressures they face, and many understand they need life answers beyond what the culture provides. They also recognize the need to help their children find a firm footing in life.

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**Life as a single parent: Constant overload**

**Widowed father**

When Jeff's wife suddenly died, he lost a friend and partner. His children lost a fun mother who knew how to communicate with each of them and juggle all the household responsibilities. In the wake of the incident, Jeff quickly began working double duty to raise his sons.

“I was living at a level of overload,” he said. “When Friday evening came, after a week with three kids in school, none of them driving, and me working full-time, there was no weekend—it was strictly recovery. For months, I would get to Friday and all I could do was sit on the couch after dinner and just settle in. It was physical exhaustion, and there was no getting away from it.”

**Divorced mom**

Liz was clueless as to how to financially support her four children on her single paycheck. She had been married for 17 years before signing the divorce papers and having to parent on her own. Her emotions were being pulled in multiple directions, yet asking for help didn’t seem like a reasonable option.
The numbers: Many single-parent families now, more on the way

Two statistics provide a clear snapshot of the single-parent family population:

- 35% of all children currently live in single-parent homes¹
- 41% of children born this year will be to single mothers²

These percentages represent only the beginning of a tidal wave of single-parent families. When the growing acceptance of this lifestyle trend is coupled with the declining respect for the institution of marriage, experts are predicting a significant increase in the single-parent family population in the next 10 years.

This issue is showing up at churches’ doorsteps. How will your church respond? Let us introduce you to several congregations leading the way with innovative ministries to single parents.

Churches blaze the trail for single-parent ministry

After dealing with regular migraines, Liz’s doctor informed her she had an ulcer. She thought, “Wow, this is not working. I have to do something different. My ways are just not working at all.”

Liz began attending a local church support group made up of single parents. She started opening up to others, who offered encouragement and practical help to meet her needs.

In an effort to help single parents like Liz, some churches have developed ministries focused on single-parent families.

“I felt like if I asked for help, it would be a weakness,” said Liz. “I didn’t want to appear like I couldn’t handle it. I didn’t even really know how to ask for help, or what I needed.”

Single-parent families are on the rise, creating a challenge and an opportunity for churches.

Liz, a single mom from North Carolina, received help with parenting from her church.
Family-based ministry conducts outreach in Oregon

“There are thousands of single parents and their children sitting outside our church doors every Sunday who do not feel like God’s love, acceptance, forgiveness and grace is for them,” said Robyn Besemann, director of Family Connections at Eugene First Baptist Church in Eugene, OR.

Besemann has served single-parent families through Family Connections for the past 12 years. She has seen how this ministry has proven an effective outreach tool and benefited everyone involved, from single-parent and other families in her church to members of their community.

“We have families from all over our area who attend our events, activities, camps and services,” she said. “The social services of our area know and respect this ministry and refer people to them; Christian therapists refer families to our ministry.”

Meeting practical needs in Houston, Texas

The Second Gear program offered by Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, employs full-time mechanics to work on cars for the cost of parts, and to offer training to single parents on how to check the oil and perform other car maintenance tasks. Singles Minister Brad Goad said it’s been remarkable to watch these families become a part of the church and in turn, minister to other single parents and their children.

“I’ve seen the greatest success … with single parents helping other single parents because they’ve traveled that same road,” he said. “They know the hard times, but they also know … you take it a day at a time, a step at a time, and you can make it. They see and learn from each other, and I think that’s where they find the most comfort.”

Welcoming with open arms in Alabama

Belinda Green leads the single-parent ministry among her congregation of 700 at Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence, AL, and sees such a ministry as a necessary arm of a church.

“Many single parents aren’t sure they are welcome in church,” she said. “They face many challenges and should know there is a place where they are accepted and will receive love and encouragement for them and their children. When a church fails to reach out to them and provide a place for them, they are missing a huge portion of the population.”

Finding God through single-parent ministry at Maryland church

Adam Malcolm, pastor at Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, MD, said key aspects to a single-parent ministry are “that the gospel is taught and applied, and that single parents are encouraged to understand, know and trust God to be who He says He is, even in the midst of suffering and difficult circumstances.” Those who visit Covenant Life’s single-parent ministry discover the hope of the gospel for day-to-day living.
Elements of effective single-parent ministry

Single-parent ministry leaders say effective single-parent ministries should include:

- Pastors and church leaders who support and believe in the ministry
- Biblical, Christ-centered instruction
- A vision for the outreach and evangelism potential of such a ministry
- A leadership team of current or former single parents who can minister to other single parents
- A prayer team of church members
- Free or low-cost activities that provide an environment for single-parent families to interact with each other and other families in the church
- Strategies for welcoming single-parent families into all aspects of church life

“Make sure the leaders of the church are aware of this [ministry] opportunity,” Goad said, “because it’s a great outreach for … any churches in the community or any city, it doesn’t matter how big or how small.”

As both Pastor Goad and Dr. Scott Turansky, cofounder of the National Center for Biblical Parenting, suggested, such ministries become even more effective when their structures include single parents ministering to other single parents.

“All parents have a need to collaborate, to get ideas,” said Turansky. “A single parent often lacks that other person living in the house to get advice from or to dialogue with, and so it’s very important for the single parent to have friends, counselors and other friends they value … and can come and talk to and get advice from.”

Answering the demands in churches worldwide

Other churches find creative ways to meet the practical needs of single parents. Examples include:

- Programs offering windows of child care “respite” for harried single moms or dads
- Mentoring relationships providing role models for children
- Food and clothing distribution programs helping meet needs of families
- Teams of church men performing basic home repair for single moms
A new single-parent ministry strategy you can use

Church Initiative introduces innovative Single & Parenting curriculum

Single & Parenting is an all-new curriculum for churches wanting to minister to single-parent families. Developed by Church Initiative, Inc., the makers of DivorceCare and GriefShare, this 13-week program features a DVD- and workbook-driven study that provides biblical insight to the challenges and situations these families face from experts in the field and single parents. Single & Parenting is designed to be lay-led, and highlights a Christ-centered, biblical approach to single-parenting issues.

First Assembly of God in Concord, NC, has had a single-parent ministry for less than a year, and is preparing for the arrival of their Single & Parenting materials.

“We are trying Single & Parenting because we were not quite satisfied with the current curriculum we have been using for single moms,” said Singles Pastor Kevin Whidden. “We have experience with [Church Initiative’s] DivorceCare material and thought if the Single & Parenting material was similar in quality, it would be a good move for us. Also, we are interested in reaching single dads, and Single & Parenting seems to be open to single moms and dads.”

Visit SingleandParenting.org to learn more about how to begin changing the lives of single-parent families in your community with a Single & Parenting program at your church.

(Endnotes)