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## For the Life of the World

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# Singleness in the

Andrea L. Schultz



*Above: Andrea working on updating CTSFW's event listings and online calendar.*

In the middle of every magazine issue themed around the topic of family is the obligatory “single” article. For good reason: the Body of Christ is made up of many members, and those brothers and sisters in Christ whom we call family (though we may share little to no blood) come from a variety of backgrounds. Even the singles have many different stories: widowed, divorced, never married, never interested, or desperately interested. Sometimes these stories are shaped by personal choice, but oftentimes we live a role that has been given against our desires rather than welcomed.

# Body of Christ

To comfort those who mourn the fact that they have no spouse, we often speak of the gift of singleness. The words are well meant, driven by a compassionate desire to console and reassure, and every single time I have to suppress the passive-aggressive urge to ask if it comes with a gift receipt for easy return. Loneliness is a hard companion. It also isn't the only one. Not all mourn their unmarried state; celibacy has been given to them and they are content.

We see scriptural validation for both feelings reflected in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 7:8, Paul exhorts, "to the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am." Paul clearly liked being single ("I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God," verse 7) but others didn't. Naomi bitterly mourned the loss of her husband and sons. Jephthah's daughter, condemned to death for her father's tragic vow, took to the mountains in preparation and specifically "wept for her virginity" (Judges 11:38).

However, emotion isn't a faithful judge of reality, especially for sinners. Too often we mourn what we should celebrate and rejoice when we should weep. But we do have this reassurance: though the heart knows its own bitterness, God knows every heart. No one on earth may be able to understand your deepest feelings of either abandonment or contentment—or that strange pendulum swing between both—but your heavenly Father, who loves His dear children, sees even deeper into your heart than you can. And He does not speak platitudes; He speaks in the language of reality.

Though the Bible does talk at length about marriage—from who we are

as the Bride of Christ to the practical laws established in the Old Testament that dealt with marriage, how to care for widows, and expectations for the unmarried—not one of its 66 books uses the word "singleness." In the ESV, the word "single" appears in the context of marriage only twice: in Exodus 21:3, in terms of a law concerning slaves, and then in 1 Corinthians 7 as quoted above. "Single" more often appears as a description: single hours and days of judgment, or single members of the Body of Christ. Jesus, the Bridegroom of the Church, speaks on the subject only once, after His disciples declare that it is better not to marry. "But he said to them, 'Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given ... Let the one who is able to receive this receive it'" (Matt. 19:11-12).

Singleness is not an identity. It is a description of a state of being, and perhaps a temporary one. But is it a gift?

Certainly there are gifts that come with singleness. Time. Money. Choices. You have more choices about where and how you spend both. There are also fewer distractions as well as opportunities to sin against our closest neighbors, as the Apostle Paul lays out in 1 Corinthians 7:28, 32-35:

Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that ... I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about

*Below: Andrea lending a hand with a diaper drive for Shepherd's Hand, a community outreach organization in Fort Wayne.*



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**So is singleness itself a gift? Yes...but not necessarily to you. The gift of singleness is not a gift to the single but a gift given to the Church through the single person. You are the gift. Your singleness may be either a cross to bear or a state to celebrate, but whether in sorrow or joy you cannot help but be given more fully to the Church. Singles are a gift from the Lord.**

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the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

So is singleness itself a gift? Yes... but not necessarily to you. The gift of singleness is not a gift to the single but a gift given to the Church through the single person. *You* are the gift. Your singleness may be either a cross to bear or a state to celebrate, but whether in sorrow or joy, you cannot help but be given more fully to the Church. Singles are a gift from the Lord.


When a man is called to serve a woman as her husband and a woman to a man as his wife, they receive special, strict expectations about their priorities: the woman must submit to her husband, who must lay down his life for his wife (Eph. 5). When my father served as a missionary in Southeast Asia, he eventually began helping to train Cambodian pastors, work that was both satisfying and fulfilling; work he shortly had to leave to serve my mother and me. My two older siblings had graduated high school and returned to America, and my mother could not stand another year that far from her children. As a husband and father, his decision was undoubtedly pleasing to the Lord. But the Church lost him as a teacher to the Cambodians. Certainly, through his and my mother's dedication, they have raised up three faithful members of the Church (two of whom are now bringing up their own families in Christ), but many of their skills and talents had to be dedicated to their children and to each other.

As a single person, I do not have to make those choices. I serve the Church here at Concordia Theological Seminary, managing our online presence and collecting and writing pieces to help pass on learning to the Church while connecting those outside our walls with

the faculty and students within them—work I would not be doing if I was married, and especially if I had children. And what of the work of the ancient Church: of Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, or Paul? Would he have traveled as he did? Risked his life on his many dangerous mission trips? What of Christ?

Yet even we who are single are not single. Christ wasn't single and neither are we: we are His Bride. Nor are we even single members in the Body of Christ: "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor. 12:18-19).

The Church is our family in a way that singles understand implicitly. Even without the normal ties that bind, we are brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, parents, friends, and children. We don't share blood—and yet we share the only blood that matters. Baptized into the Church, the name of the Triune God written on our foreheads identifies whose family we belong to as we stand with the Lamb (Rev. 14). Biologically we share grandparents from long ago—Adam and Eve and later Noah and his wife—but we are tied most closely and strongly by the blood given and shed on the cross; the same Body and Blood given in, with, and under bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

Single or married, burdened or uplifted, here is the reality: Christ knows your troubles and your joys and the gifts He has specifically given to you because you are single—and the gift he has given to the Church through your singleness. We need not fear what is only a description. We are Christ's. "And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mark 3:34-35). 

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**Below:** *Andrea (front row, second from left) sings with Synod congregation choir members at the Opening Divine Service of the 67th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.*



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