

**PREPARATION FOR A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: A QUALITATIVE
INVESTIGATION OF THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION COURSE AT
CHRIST CHURCH CONSTANTIA**

by

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Declaration

I declare that Preparation for a Christian Marriage: A qualitative investigation of the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia is my work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Mary Ann, from who I had learnt more about the meaning and joy of marital communication than all the books on the subject.

Summary

As sometime course facilitator of the Marriage Preparation Course of my faith community, an Anglican Church of Southern Africa, I had become curious as to what meaning the couples had constructed of their participation in these courses, particularly relating to both the content and style of facilitating the Course. The research finding determined that the main value of the Course had been that the group discussions enabled couples to explore their personal positions on a number of issues related to marriage. The adoption of participative action research as a broad model for the Course is recommended to encourage the engagement between premarital couples and the course facilitator to create/find knowledges and practices that will prepare them for marriage. Furthermore, the course facilitator should adopt a not-knowing, curious stance toward the elements of marriage under discussion, employing the narrative tools of externalisation and deconstructive questioning to facilitate the couples' meaning-making.

Key Terms: marriage preparation, premarital counselling, narrative approach, qualitative research approach, case study, *participative* action research, social constructionism, post-modern practical theology

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Chapter One

Planning My Research Journey

1. The Journey into My Research Theme

An important corollary of my research studies in Pastoral Therapy has been my personal journey with regards to my Marriage Preparation ministry at Christ Church Constantia¹, Cape Town. The vehicle for this journey has been the research undertaken for this dissertation and which, I hope to show, will reflect the maturing of my personal discoveries relating to the adoption of a more participatory approach to marriage preparation. This research journey has been characterised by the adoption of a quantitative research approach and design that endeavoured to focus the investigation of the Marriage Preparation Course in terms of the experiences of the participants. As a consequence of the process of writing the subsequent dissertation, which had necessitated several drafts in response to the reflections of my dissertation supervisors, my thoughts and reflections on the Marriage Preparation Course of my faith community were shaped, and, I sense, will go on to be shaped as I continue to minister in this field of marriage preparation.

Since the latter half of 2004 my wife, Mary Ann, and I have been members of the Marriage Ministry Team at our parish church, which is part of the pastoral care ministry at this church, and our particular ministry has been marriage preparation. This initiative flows from the energetic ministry of our rector of seven years standing, Keith, who has actively encouraged the development of lay pastoral ministry at Christ Church that is anchored in liturgical worship (including a prayer ministry at the altar rail and in the side chapel), but is also extended to a pastoral care ministry that at present embraces visiting of the sick, bereavement support and both baptism and marriage preparation as well as marriage enrichment courses. This pastoral approach to ministry does seem to reflect Howard Clinebell's model of pastoral care which "recognizes liturgy, ritual, confession, and traditional and contemporary Christian resources as *beneficial components*" (*emphasis added*) (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:43). In this way pastoral care becomes a sign of the covenant relationship where we are called to be with one another and our faithful Creator God (Gerkin 1986:20-21). Although I have fully supported the position of my faith community that all couples who are intent on a Christian wedding at Christ Church Constantia

¹ The Anglican Church of Southern Africa

should undergo a Marriage Preparation Course, I did find that as I became more directly engaged with the presentation and facilitation of the Marriage Preparation Course that I had wondered about the impact of the Course on the couples who had participated and completed the Course.

While Keith had been responsible for facilitating the Marriage Preparation Course, which he developed some years ago based broadly on guidelines drawn up in the United Kingdom by Margaret Stevens (1986) for the Catholic parish of St Leonard, Wollaton, Nottingham (*see Appendix A: The Marriage Preparation Course*), he adopted what I would describe as an essentially didactic approach in presenting the material of the Course. Although Keith would emphasize during his presentation that he does not have the right answers to a successful Christian marriage and he encourages couple and group discussion, he still in effect teaches the content of the Course. When Keith went on a five-month sabbatical leave in 2005 and left my wife and I in charge of marriage preparation, we endeavoured to encourage lively discussions within the larger group around the issues presented during the Course. Undoubtedly our approach had been shaped by many years of facilitating small groups on Life Line training courses where experiential learning was supported through active interaction between members in the group. It had always been our assumption that this more participatory approach would be interesting for the couples as well as encourage them to grapple with the issues that we presented on the Course².

2. Research curiosity

My initial wondering as to the relevance of the Marriage Preparation Course for modern day couples had matured to the point where I had become particularly curious as to what impact the *content* of the Marriage Preparation Course (i.e. *the differentiation of self; the art of communication; roles and responsibilities in marriage; love, sexuality and parenting; and faith and spirituality in Christian marriage*) has had on those couples who have participated and completed the Course since 2004 (when my wife and I became involved). At the same time, I had also become curious as to what influence, if any, the *style of facilitating* this Course may have had on the meaning-making by the couples of the Course contents. I had been guided by this curiosity in the formulation of my research aims.

² See Appendix A for a more detailed outline of the history of the Course, its context and contents.

3. The Research Aim

In the light of the above research curiosity, I would formulate the overall research aim for this study as being an attempt to understand how the couples participating in the above-mentioned Course during the review period of August 2004 to October 2006 had *experienced* the Marriage Preparation Course. This understanding could only be achieved by the holding of conversations with the participating couples concerning their experiences of the Course. I had attempted, during these conversations, to hear the couples voice their unique experiences of the Course. In striving for this understanding it has been my hope to be alerted to possible ways that the contents and the style of facilitation of the Marriage Preparation Course could be shaped, not only to reflect the tradition of our faith, but also to be relevant to the life-world (Mouton 1996:104) of modern couples entering into a Christian marriage at the beginning of the 21st century.

Taking into account that for a number of the Course participants their memories would have been challenged by the fact that they had participated in the Course several years ago, an additional aim would be to discover to what extent the passage of time may have eroded the value of the Course for the couples. In this regard it is interesting to note the study of Williams, Ridley, Risch and Van Dyke (1999:278) where they report that two-thirds of couples surveyed expressed the value of marriage preparation but that this perceived value declined considerable with the passing of years.

Although my wife and I have in the main been responsible for the four sessions, namely the *differentiation of self*; the *art of communication*; *roles and responsibilities in marriage*; *love, sexuality and parenting*; my investigation would also extend to the faith and spirituality aspects of the Course (Sessions One and Six).

In order to research these aims, I have been guided by a specific research approach and conceptual framework as outlined below.

4. Conceptual framework

4.1 Discursive position

As researcher I find myself positioned within the post-modern discourse that is critical of the absolutist stance of the humanised sciences that insists “that knowledge is ‘about’ something external to the knower, and can present itself

objectively to the knower". The post-modern discourse holds that it is the nature of knowledge to be provisional and transitory, requiring "continual reflexivity" and that language mediates and constitutes reality, not reflect or represent it objectively (Lowe 1991:43). As researcher I cannot in the process of this investigation disentangle myself as an objective observer from the observed (i.e. the Course participants' account of their experiences) and consequently my findings of the investigation become "a literal creation or construction of the inquiry process" (Schwandt 1994:128). As author I therefore abandon my position as "aloof researcher" who is understood to command a "clear window into the inner life" of my "subjects" and I recognise my presence in the text of this dissertation (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:9, 11-12) through the usage of the first person singular "I". In effect, to hide my presence in the text of this dissertation is "to pretend that my words are separate from me" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:10) as if it is possible to hide from my lived experience of this research. In particular, the acknowledgement of my presence in the text is also to acknowledge my own journey towards more of a participatory mode of consciousness and the blurring of the self-other separation of the researcher and the "object of inquiry" (Heshusius 1995:122; Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9). In "making this self-disclosure", I face up to my obligations as participant in this research while revealing "the status and the ownership of the knowledge" generated by the research process (Hall 1996:36).

As a narrative pastoral therapist in training I have increasingly become attentive to the post-modern perspective that purports that essentially it is only the *lived* experiences (stories) of our lives that is *knowable* and that these stories "form the matrix of concepts and beliefs by which we understand our lives" (Payne 2000:20). This post-modernist view holds that reality and truth is not something to be *discovered* but rather that reality and truth is *socially constructed* through the interactive influence of language as expressed through the family and social culture. In effect, we *language our reality and truth* and these realities are given life through the stories that we live and tell (Freedman & Combs 1996:22-30). It is only through our *experiences* that we have knowledge of the world (Anderson 1997:36) and these experiences are expressed through the *language* of a particular cultural and social context (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:5). Language therefore does not *represent* reality as such but rather *is* reality (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:6). Put in another way: The sense that we hold of ourselves, our shaping and reality is not something to be found or discovered in our genes, but rather is socially constructed through the

language that is derived within a particular linguistic community (Lynch 1998:527; Weedon 1987: 21). This development in social science thinking rejects then the uncritical imposition of the scientific model of explanation onto conscious life activities” (Newman 2000:252), which since the Renaissance has influenced “the belief that language is able to function as a neutral vehicle for the objective observation of the world” (Lynch 1998:526) and that knowledge of the world can be external to the observer (Lowe 1991:43; Anderson 1997: 30).

In understanding that there “are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed” (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:12) (which in this case would be the couples who have participated in the Course), I have endeavoured as researcher to be “a curious, interested, [yet] very partial participant...in the production of meanings” (Drewery & Winslade 1997:42) by these couples. In acknowledging my own partiality, I endeavoured to develop a participatory rapport with the research participants that would enable them to tell their *lived* experience (story) of the Marriage Preparation Course with the minimal imposition of my own (post-modernist *and* modernist) views on their particular perspective and view of marriage. The reader may judge for him- or herself to what extent I had succeeded in this endeavour.

From a practical theological perspective, I also need to acknowledge that as a pastoral caregiver in our parish, I hold the passionate belief that the pastoral work my wife and I are engaged in is an “incarnation event” (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:42), which De Jongh van Arkel (2000: 41-42) describes as pastoral work and care that “is carried by, and finds its dynamic in, the presence of God’s Spirit” and in which “God’s care becomes concretely realised”. It is also my understanding that this pastoral work takes place within the context of the “community of saints”, or another way of putting it in Martin Luther’s words, the “priesthood of believers” (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:43-44). At the same time, I recognize that this pastoral work forms part of practical theology which Heitink (1999:251) has identified as *poimenics* where theory is concerned with the care for the individual. As a pastoral caregiver working within my faith community, I find myself therefore positioned as a part-time practical theologian since this work is an expression of the *praxis* of my faith where the theory is developed and evaluated within the context of that practice (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:6-7; 10). John de Gruchy (1994, 2; 11) in particular speaks of

“*doing theology*” (the praxis), which he sees as an engagement with what the Word of God means *concretely* in a *particular* context and situation. In this instance the context is the marriage preparation ministry within my faith community at Christ Church Constantia, where my praxis as caregiver also requires some critical theoretical reflection on the efficacy of the work. I return to this reflection at the end of Chapter Five (*see* Chap. 5, sec. 2).

In concluding this reflection on my personal discursive position, I would like to introduce a personal metaphor for this research study that hopefully reflects my understanding of how I am able to live honestly within the tension of holding both modernist and post-modernist positions. I am using this metaphor as a way of explaining the value of modernism and its truths about marriage while acknowledging that there is also a strong element of uncertainty in the holding of this position in that couples construct their own truths concerning marriage and their faith. I call this my *sea shell* metaphor.

My wife and I walk regularly on a certain beach that is situated on the cold Atlantic side of Cape Town and where we from time to time at a particular place would find and pick up small cowrie shells at low tide. According to both “local” and scientific knowledges these shells are found only in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. It has therefore been a constant delight for us each time we have found these small, “cold water” cowries on our walks. Although we do not always find the shells, yet, based on our past experiences, we have developed an expectancy of finding cowries during one of our beach walks. An argument could therefore be made that a certain degree of *predictability* has been introduced into our imagination as to the possibility of finding cowries on this particular stretch of beach. What is however interesting about our shell-finding experiences is that each time we do discover one of these small, perfectly shaped shells, we are *surprised* and delighted. So, although there is a degree of predictability and expectancy in the likelihood of finding cowries, each sighting remains a new, surprising and *unique* experience.

From the modernist perspective, in all likelihood, it would be possible from the analysis of the interviews with the married couples for this study, to *discover* predictability of outcome if certain conditions are present. If this were the argument that we made on our beach walks, expecting to find the cowries in the light of certain environmental conditions, then we would not be open to the surprise and delight of the uniqueness of each cowrie finding. It therefore has remained an underlying intention of this study to respect the meaning that

each interviewed couple attaches to their experiences of the Marriage Preparation Course.

Victor Frankl, who had lived through and survived the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II, had concluded from his painful experiences that “[m]an’s search for meaning is a primary force in his life” (Frankl 1962:97). For my wife and me, discovering the cowrie shells in a place that is an inhospitable habitat for these molluscs has become imbued with spiritual meaning, a meaning that we have given to our experiences. It is a firmly held belief of mine that the act of meaning-making or instilling meaning into our life experiences, whether these are so-called personal experiences or the research experiences of the scientist or scholar is what characterises the behaviour of human beings. I propose therefore that rather than *discovering* meaning through my research, that a certain meaning has been *made* as the consequence of interpreting the information collected, categorised and analysed. At the same time, I have striven in making meaning from my conversations with the couples to remain as far as humanly possible true to the couples’ “construction of reality – how they understand [their] world” (Merriam 1998:203).

At the end of Chapter Five I reflect on whether my personal metaphor has held true for me on my research journey (*see* Chap. 5, sec. 3).

4.2. Research Approach

Before I reflect on my research design (*see* section 4.3 below), I need to indicate the particular perspective that I have adopted to manage my research study. Accordingly, I then outline below the approach that I have adopted for this research undertaking.

4.2.1 A Case Study

As stated above, the aim of my research has been to investigate the impact of the present Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia on those couples who had completed it over the past three years, with the object in mind of possibly adjusting and even re-designing the Course so that it reflects the needs of couples entering a Christian marriage at the beginning of the 21st Century.

In order to achieve this aim I have approached my research as a *case study* since the focus of my investigation has been *this* Marriage Preparation Course, bounded to a specific place and time and context and being of particular

interest to myself as one of the Course facilitators (Stake 1994:236-237). In seeking to gain an “in-depth understanding” of the meaning (Merriam, 1998:21) that the couples have made of their involvement in the Course over a period of time (three years) and in a particular setting (Christ Church Constantia), I have approached the Marriage Preparation Course as a case study. The focus of my interest has been to gain a better understanding of the *contents* and *processes* of the Course *as experienced* by the couples (Merriam 1998:19; Stake 1994:236) and in seeking this understanding, I had hoped to be able to determine whether the purpose of this Course of *preparing* couples for a Christian marriage has in any way being realised (Leedy & Ormrod 2005: 135-136) (*see* Chap. 5).

4.2.2 *Qualitative approach*

I furthermore position my approach to *this* research as being in the main *qualitative* and I am particularly indebted to Merriam (1998:6-8) for my exposition of this position. In the first place, as a researcher working within the qualitative mode, I am particularly interested to understand *the meaning* that the couples have *constructed* of their participation in the Marriage Preparation Course. Secondly, I have sought to acquire the data for this research by means of interactive conversations with the couples. As qualitative researcher *I* became the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This means that the data collected through these interview conversations were mediated through my active, responsive participation in the conversations with the couples. Thirdly, the research involved some fieldwork in that some of the conversations took place in the homes of the couples participating in the research. This was necessary as some of the couples now have small babies and it was more convenient for them to be interviewed in their homes³. Fourthly, my research findings are a description of what I have learned from my conversations with the participating couples, relying essentially on their experiences of the Course. Finally, the theoretical conclusions of this dissertation are therefore arrived at through an inductive process that is grounded in the observations and intuitive understandings that I may have gained in the field.

³ The bulk of the interviews did however take place in the Church Library, the same venue used for the marriage preparation course.

4.2.3 *Participatory research*

Although this case study does seek to understand the meaning that the couples have constructed of their experiences of the Marriage Preparation Course by holding conversations with them, this research does *not* purport to be fully *participatory action research*. It is understood that all interviews are “active” in that interview respondents are not mere “repositories of knowledge” from whom meaning is “elicited by apt questioning”, but rather that interview respondents are “constructors of knowledge in association with interviewers” (Holstein & Gubrium 2004:141). Holstein and Gubrium (2004:154) summarise concisely the *active participation of interviewer and respondent*:

Viewing the interview as active, we can acknowledge and appreciate how the interviewer participates with the respondent in shifting positions in the interview so as to explore alternative perspectives and stocks of knowledge. The interviewer sets the general parameters for responses, constraining as well as provoking answers that are germane to the researcher’s interest. The pertinence of what is discussed is partly defined by the research topic and partly by the substantive horizons of the ongoing interview exchange.

Nevertheless, the focus of this research *is* the Marriage Preparation Course and not the marital practices of the couples who had participated in the Course. By *participating* in this research the couples were *not* actively working towards the improvement of their marital practices nor were they directly involved in the possible re-design of the Course (Taggart 1997:36).

I did however invite the participation of the couples in the research by firstly inviting their critical response to the letters that I wrote to them summarizing the content of our conversation. Furthermore, I also had submitting the draft of Chapters Three and Four to the couples for their comment. These chapters represent my reflections on their contributions during the interviews and I invited the couples to suggest any changes to the text that they felt would reflect more truthfully their experiences of the Course. In reality, disappointingly few couples responded to either my letters or the chapters and those that did reply merely affirmed in various ways their enjoyment of the Course and the opportunity to reflect on that experience by means of our interview conversations.

4.2.4 *Subjectivity of researcher*

According to the argument put by Holstein and Gubrium (2004:154) quoted above, it is not possible to gain a so-called “objective” insight into the

experiences of the couples that would be untainted by my experiences and perceptions. Rather my own assumptions are reflected in the questions that I had put to the couples and the judgments that I continually made as I recorded what I heard, observed and experienced during the interviews (Mason 2002:77) (see section 5.5 below, *Making Argument*). My approach to this case study has been one of endeavouring to acknowledge any assumptions that I may make in the course of this research as well as values that I hold, wherever I am aware of these, and not to assume a privileged stance of understanding but rather to be guided by a respectful curiosity concerning the couples' stories and experiences. At the same time, as noted above, I submitted my subjective views to the scrutiny of the interviewed couples, offering them the opportunity to enrich further the interpretation that I had brought to their experiences of the Course (Merriam 1998:85).

I had also sought as I held conversations with the couples as well as afterwards while analysing these conversations, not to mirror only the dominant view, but to be attentive to pluralist voices amongst the participants. Again, by submitting my first drafts of Chapters Three and Four for their comment, the couples were placed in a position where they could bring out any minority and subjugated voices that I had not necessarily heard and reflected in my analysis of the interviews (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:75).

5. Research design

5.1 Introduction

In giving consideration to the research design for this research study, attention needed to be given to what kind of sampling strategy would be adopted; how the research data was to be gathered; how the data was to be analysed; and, finally, how argument would be made from this analysis.

5.2 Sampling strategy

Taking into account my discursive position that “knowledges” from *personal lived experience* are all that we can truly know and since I want “to discover, understand, and gain insight” (Merriam 1998:61) into the couples' experience of the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia, I adopted what Merriam calls “purposeful sampling” as my strategy for gathering data. This strategy required me to identify the selection criteria for choosing the couples to be interviewed.

5.2.1 *Who to sample*

For me as pastoral caregiver involved in the marriage ministry of our church, the aim of this case study has been to gain an understanding of how couples had experienced the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:135; Merriam 1998: 72). Since I do not intend to universalise my discoveries of this study to all other faith communities and couples intending on marriage elsewhere, the sampling was limited to my faith community with the focus on married couples who had completed the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia for the period 2004 to 2006 (Mason 2002:123-124).

5.2.2 *Sampling frame (how many to sample)*

If this had been a quantitative case study of couples married at Christ Church Constantia, it would have been appropriate to draw a statistical representative sample from the *population* of couples married at the church (Mouton 1996:134). The population of couples prepared and married at Christ Church Constantia for the period under review involved 11 groups. During 2004 two groups were prepared; four groups in 2005; and five groups in 2006. The groups averaged five couples (some instances there were six and in one instance only three couples), totally over the three-year period some 60 couples.

As this is a qualitative study and the sampling selection is not based on a statistical sampling formula, the selection still needs to be *relevant* to the study even if not strictly statistically representative of this wider population (Mason 2002:124). In order to avoid selecting couples that could confirm my own preconceived assumptions in this study, the selection was based on a *random* sampling approach where every couple had “an equal chance of being selected” (Mouton 1996:138). I therefore took the 11 name lists of the marriage preparation courses that were held over the review period of 2004 to 2006 and selected at random a couple from each list who had completed the Course during this period (Mason 2002:127). I varied the couple selected from each list by selecting at random a couple from each list. I then phoned the selected couple and, after briefly explaining that I was evaluating the Course for my master’s degree in practical theology, I invited the couple to be interviewed by me. Most of the couples were willing and interested to participate in my research and a number of couples expressed their pleasure at been given the opportunity to reflect on the Marriage Preparation Course. Whenever a couple

from a particular group was unable or unwilling (due to personal pressures) to participate, I would then at random pick another couple from that particular group. I did however have the experience with the February/March 2005 Group that couple after couple was unable, unwilling or unavailable to participate until the last couple left on my list readily agreed to be interviewed. In selecting one couple per marriage preparation group, I undertook to interview additional couples if considered necessary in terms of satisfying the overall aim of this study, namely to gain an understanding of how couples in the past have experienced the present Marriage Preparation Course. After completing the intended target of interviews, I was satisfied that this aim had been achieved and that any additional interviews would not necessarily further enrich my understanding of how the Course had been experienced (Merriam 1998:64; Mason 2002:136). Altogether 11 interviews were therefore conducted.

5.3 Gathering of the data

5.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Since the intention of this case study is to try to understand the couples' experience of the Marriage Preparation Course (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:135), the chosen method of data gathering was to *interview* the selected couples, adopting a *semi-structured approach* where "the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (Merriam 1998:74) (*see Appendix B: Interview Guide*).

The questions were formulated with the research aim in mind, namely to explore the topics of the Marriage Preparation Course in relation to the related areas of married life of each couple and to determine to what extent the knowledge and insight acquired during their participation in the Course had been integrated into the marriage relationship. The interview strategy was based on "the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual" and that the data would be constructed through the dialogue and interaction during the interview (Mason 2002:62; Merriam 1998:74). Consequently each of the couples were asked the same questions concerning the Marriage Preparation Course, but inevitably, as had been anticipated, each interview tended to develop its own character and nature reflecting each couple's unique and individual experience of the Course.

Mason (2002:69-71) was followed in the formulation of the questions by breaking the topics to be discussed down into manageable categories. For

example, the session topic “*Knowing yourself, knowing your partner*” (the differentiation of the self) required to be broken down into smaller, sub-categories. The overall research question in this instance is *whether the topic ‘Knowing yourself, knowing your partner’ had alerted the couple to their individual differences and strengths, and how has this knowledge in any way been of assistance in their marriage?* Taking into consideration the material covered under this topic, several sub-category questions came to mind; for instance:

- a. *Prior to the Course, had either or both of you been aware of significant differences in values, perceptions, attitudes, abilities, etc. in one another?*
- b. *Subsequent to the Course, if you had gained new insight into differences between you, how had this in any way impacted on your relationship as a married couple?*
- c. *Prior to the Course, had either or both of you been aware of the other’s particular strength within the relationship and what had you identified that particular strength(s), ability, gift to have been?*
- d. *Subsequent to the Course, if you had gained new insight into your partner’s strength(s) within the relationship, how had this in any way been of benefit to your relationship as a married couple?*

Similarly, the other session topics were broken down into sub-category questions (see Appendix B).

However, what I did discover as the process of interviews progressed was that the occasion for many of these finer, detailed questions did not in fact necessarily arise. The initial broader question would start the conversation but often the conversation would then take a direction that interested the couple and in the process addressed some, although not necessarily all, of the sub-category questions. In Chapter Five I reflect as to how this failure to adhere strictly to the Interview Guide had impacted on the data collected for this research investigation.

5.3.2 *Capturing of data*

The option was available to me to tape-record the interviews and then to transcribe them subsequently, which would have provided me with a text for analysis afterwards (Merriam 1998:87). As a narrative pastoral counsellor I have however preferred to rely on the methodology of my counselling practice and therefore took notes of the interviews and directly after each interview

wrote a letter to the couple summarising and reflecting on the course of our conversation. These letters were then sent by e-mail to the couples inviting them to correct or expand on any part of the letter. In all cases the couples were satisfied that my letters were a fair reflection of our conversation. These letters subsequently became my data for analysis and interpretation (Merriam 1998:88).

5.4 Analysing the data

It is the recommended approach when analysing text to index it according to the various topics that may arise in the text (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:136; Mason 2002:150-151, 162; Merriam 1998:164). Although it had initially been my intention to adopt this approach, it soon became clear to me as the interviews took place and the interview letters were written that no practical purpose would be gained by undertaking an elaborate indexing system of these letters. After all, the five broad topics (sessions) of the Marriage Preparation Course that provided the basis for the interviews in effect informed the themes for my analysis. For ease of use, however, I did mark up the letters according to these broad topics, noting in particular where a particular topic may arise out of context elsewhere in the conversation. Furthermore, after I had worked through the text of the 11 interviews covering the first session, for the remaining sessions I used an informal colour code system to highlight the electronic text that reflected related themes across the different interviews. Finally, any critical comments of helpful suggestions to improve the Course were also noted and recorded.

5.5 Making Argument

In making *argument* from the analysed data, the aim of this case study, namely to gain an understanding of how couples over the past three years have experienced the Marriage Preparation Course of our church, has been kept foremost in mind. By focusing the interviews around the marriage preparations topics, I was well aware that I was imposing a specific lens on the data being gathered and analysed and therefore from a narrative perspective in effect limiting the story of each couple's lived experience of their marriage (Mason 2002:165). The different stories of the interviewed couples *did* reflect the "complexity, messiness, contradiction, ambiguity" (Mason 2002:177) of their lived experiences of the Course. However, since the prime focus of this research study remained that of understanding what these lived experiences could tell us about the effectiveness of the Marriage Preparation Course, the

analysis of the data and the making of argument has accordingly been focused around the questions that relate to the Course (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:136).

6. Ethical considerations

The stated purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of how couples in the past have experienced the present Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia. The first ethical question that probably immediately does arise is *who* will benefit from this research (Mason 2002:42). As indicated in my Research Approach above, the couples interviewed will not necessarily benefit directly from the interview although any changes to the Course will undoubtedly be as a consequence of the knowledge gained from their experiences of the Course and its possible impact on their marriages. It could then be argued that the couples are *indirectly* involved in the making of possible future changes to the Course. This was explained to them while at the same obtaining their permission to use the findings of the research for this purpose if such revision was deemed necessary in the light of this research. In granting this permission the couples understood that they may not agree with some, or all, of possible changes to the Course. By submitting my initial drafts of my analysis of the interviews to the couples, they were placed in a position to state their agreement or disagreement with my interpretations.

A next ethical consideration is how the attitude of the leadership of our church to the findings of this research may impact on the application of these findings (Mason 2002:42). It may well be that the minister and the church leadership do not necessarily agree to possible changes as indicated by the research findings of this study. This is an issue that involves adherence to church discipline and all the implications that holds for me as pastoral caregiver within this particular faith community. It is not anticipated that such a conflict situation should arise, but it is within the realm of possibility and therefore needs to be taken into consideration.

Perhaps of far greater concern is the ethical implication of the actual gathering of data from the couples. Although it was not anticipated that the intended in-depth interviews would evoke painful, debilitating memories taking into consideration the nature of the research topic (Merriam 1998:214), it nevertheless was possible that such negative emotions could be stirred up by the interview if the marriage relationship was undergoing difficulties. It was also possible that any observations concerning non-verbal clues as to the state of the couple's relationship might reveal aspects of their relationship that the

interviewed couple would not necessarily want to make public. As it happened, one of the interviews did reveal intimate aspects of the particular couple's marriage that they rather would not want to be made public. This raised the ethical issue of the privacy of the couples to be interviewed and the need for their informed consent in what may be used for purpose of this research (Merriam 1998:215) as well as sensitivity as to how such information was used in the research. By submitting my first draft of the analysis of the interviews to the different couples, the opportunity was created for those couples who were not comfortable with how I had portrayed some aspects of their experiences in my writings to respond accordingly. None such discomfort was however expressed by any of the interviewed couples.

Mason (2002:79-80) suggests some guidelines as to conducting qualitative interviews in an ethical way.

Firstly, in *asking questions* consideration needs to be given as to the ethical justification for asking the question. Is it justified in terms of the aim of the research while still respecting the privacy of the interviewed couple? In terms of the research aim of evaluating the Marriage Preparation Course in terms of the couples' experience of it, it is here argued that the interview questions which were formulated around the contents of the Course were ethically justifiable. The intention was never to probe into the marriages of the couples interviewed, although as indicated above, during at least one of the interviews personal and sensitive information concerning the marriage was disclosed.

Secondly, *how the questions are asked* would determine whether the interviewed couple feels uncomfortable and pressurised to reveal experiences they rather would not want to share publicly. At no time during the 11 interviews did such a situation arise, even with those couples where particularly sensitive information concerning their marriages was shared. The interviews were relaxed and the couples tended to talk freely about their experiences of the Course and any learning that they may or may not have acquired and/or applied in their marriages.

Thirdly, the interviewer should be alerted to *what the interviewees may tell* as a consequence of the trust that may be established during the interview. Again, the ethical justification for allowing such information to be imparted needs to be seriously considered. As already noted above, in some cases particularly sensitive and personal information was revealed during some of the interview

sessions, which was undoubtedly the consequence of the level of trust that was established during the interviews.

Fourthly, the ethical implication of *guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity* is that careful consideration needs to be given as to how the data is to be used when it comes to analysis and interpretation. Again, the couples' considered consent needs to be sensitively negotiated. As previously noted earlier, the couples were apprised as to the intention of the research and they were asked at the end of the interview and again when the emailed letter was sent whether their responses to my questions could be used to evaluate the Marriage Preparation Course. In most cases the couples were comfortable with this and in most instances were even happy if their first names were used in the dissertation.

Finally, *power relations are implicit in the interview interaction* whether the power is being exercised by the interviewer or the interviewees, which does hold ethical implications in terms of how the interview is conducted and the information that as a consequence is obtained. Although it was my endeavour to remain a curious participant in the interview process, I am aware that the power position of facilitator of the Course as well as researcher was a factor during these interviews. Whether such power relations could be entirely eliminated is probably not likely or even realistic to expect it. Perhaps this remains an ideal for which one strives as far as humanly possible to attain. In asking the couples for *informed consent* (Mason 2002: 81-82), I have striven in this research at all times to honour the interviewees understanding of what they have consented to and that there are limits to their participation as well as the rights of the researcher to analyse, interpret and publish the findings of the research.

Ethical considerations could impact the size of the sampling if not enough couples were found willing to consent to the conditions of the interview (Mason 2002:143). It had been assumed at the outset that there would be sufficient interest amongst the couples who have completed the Marriage Preparation Course these past three years to respond to my invitation to participate. As anticipated this has proven to be the case which produced a fair sampling for the purposes of this research.

Chapter overview

Following on from this introductory chapter, which has reflected on the research journey undertaken for this case study, the remainder of this research study follows accordingly:

In Chapter Two I review the literature pertaining to Marriage Preparation Course as well as some qualitative social science research into close and marital relationships where this research seems to be *relevant* to marriage preparation courses as discussed in the literature as well as the Course at Christ Church Constantia, Cape Town.

Chapters Three and Four represent my reflections on what I had learned from my interview conversations concerning whether the interviewed couples had felt they had been prepared for marriage through their participation in the Course.

In Chapter Five I reflect firstly on my research journey and to what extent my intended research approach had been successful in obtaining the desired data needed to satisfy my curiosity and where, in my opinion, this research approach had not served the research purpose of this study, I indicated how else I could have approached the research. I also record what I believe to have been the successes of my research undertaking.

Secondly I reflect on my personal *sea shell* metaphor and in particular the extent to which my expectations for this research had been fulfilled and in what sense I had been *surprised* by the meaning that I have made from my research journey concerning my ministry in marriage preparation.

Finally, I take the opportunity in Chapter 5 to make my recommendations concerning the adjustments and possible re-design of aspects or parts of the Course in the light of what I had learned from the interviewed couples' lived experiences of the Course.

Chapter 2

Marriage preparation as reflected in the literature

Some twenty years ago Michael Klassen (1983:73), a psychologist at Kansas State University, noted that whereas prior to World War II the focus of “premarital counseling in the church” had been the wedding itself, in the 1980s attention was now given to “instructional counseling” with the focus on “sexual adjustment, marital roles, in-law relationships, religious concerns”; and “enrichment counseling” with the emphasis on developing “skills to deal with relationship problems (e.g. conflict resolution and problem solving skills)”. The review of the literature indicates that this had remained the pattern for marriage preparation.

It should however be said at the outset that although several extensive searches were undertaken, post-1990 literature on *marriage preparation* per se has been limited. It needs to be pointed out that in most Christian bookshops in Cape Town a dozen or more titles on marriage are readily available on the bookshelves and some of the material could be of interest and value for marriage preparation, but none of these titles specifically focus on *preparing* couples for a Christian marriage. The greater weight of marriage preparation literature would then seem to be concentrated around the 1980s and 1990s with some significant writing going back to the 1970s. However, a few articles published in this century were traced and included in this review. There were however two articles that could not be obtained at the time of writing this dissertation, namely

Creed, S S 1991. Is premarital counseling worth the effort, *Journal of Family Ministry* 6 (1), 2-5

Russell, R A 1991. Assessment instruments useful in premarital counseling, *Journal of Family Ministry* 6 (1), 6-14

Finally, the focus of the literature review has been to discover what writers on marriage preparation and premarital counsel have said about the topics that are included in our Course and what emphasis they had given these topics.

1. Christian marriage under crisis

A reading of the literature reveals that a number of Christian writers had perceived *Christian* marriage since the Second War II to be as much under threat as is the modern secular marriage institution. David Mace (1975:9), a Christian marriage counsellor, for instance had already noted some three

decades ago “that marriages are breaking down on an unprecedented scale”. In the same way, at the beginning of the 1980s, the Catholic Bishops of Africa (Afer 1981) at a Synod of Bishops in Rome expressed a similar concern for marriage and family life in Africa while at the beginning of the 1990s Karl Wilson (1991:113) wrote “that our society is witnessing a tremendous weakening of the nuclear family structure, of which the marital relationship is both a vital and fundamental structure”. Here in South Africa, in the light of the alarming rise in the divorce rate, Stefan Krömker (1994:1) in his Master’s dissertation calls “for an adequate and effective marriage preparation programme”. Writing from the perspective of pastoral care within the United States context, Paul Giblin (1994:147) points to the fact that “between 40 and 50 percent of couples divorce within three years of marrying”. Yet, interestingly, Giblin (1994:147) goes on to point out that “[b]etween 60 and 80 percent of first marriages, and 30 and 40 percent of second marriages, *occur in the church*” (emphasis added). In the light of the rate of divorce in the United States and the fact that Christians are reported to be “slightly more likely to experience divorce than non-Christians”, Jennifer Barlow (1999:3) points to premarital counselling as a “preventive measure which seems to be overlooked in today’s churches in premarital counseling”.

2. The need for marriage preparation

Growing out of this concern for the threat to Christian marriage was then the perceived need for marriage preparation or what the American writers call premarital counseling. In the opinion of the South African Catholic Bishop, Stephen Naidoo (Afer 1981:51-53), the “breakdown of marriage and family life” is due not only “to social and economic conditions” but also to the “*lack of due preparation for marriage*” (emphasis added). Mace (1975:10) has argued that the need for marriage preparation grows out of the changing nature of marriage from a hierarchical institution that focused on the production of children and the maintenance of family traditions to the “companionship” marriage, which he maintained is much more “difficult to operate” and requires the skilful management of personal relationships within the marriage. Margaret Stevens (1986:4) argues that the Church has a responsibility to prepare couples for marriage since most couples “need help with learning how to cope with change and acquiring and developing the necessary skills with which to build up their relationships”. Krömker’s (1994:1-4) argument for marriage preparation is that it should be seen as “*a tool for primary*

intervention, whereby major family disruptions and painful relationship dysfunctions can be prevented to a large extent” (emphasis added). According to an interdenominational survey of clergy in the United States, 94 percent agreed that premarital counselling should be a requirement of all couples intending to marry (Jones 1994:183).

3. Theological positioning of Christian Marriage Preparation

Some writers on Christian marriage preparation have specifically placed marriage preparation within the context of the ministry of the Church. Writing some forty years ago the Protestant clergyman Martin Parsons (1967:47) had stated unambiguously that marriage is “instituted by God himself” and that the *purpose* of marriage preparation is to bring the couple to “commitment to faith in Christ, and life in his Church, which is the only true basis to a successful and happy marriage”. More recently Krömker (1994:5) sounded a similar tone by pointing out that marriage is considered “*by many to be a God-given institution*” (emphasis added). David Rolfe (1983:238) took the position that marriage preparation is “a *valid and important ministry of the church* designed to assist couples in their task of preparing for their marriage” (emphasis added).

The preface to the Christian Marriage Service in the *Anglican Prayer Book 1989* of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) clearly states the theological position that marriage is grounded in the teaching of Jesus that “a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh (Mark 10:7)”. The preface goes on to state that:

The inseparable bond between a man and his wife thus mirrors the relationship between Jesus and his bride the Church.... For both husband and wife the high calling of Christian married life is this total self-giving. It is communion of the deepest sort (Anglican Prayer Book 1989:457).

The House of Bishops of the Church of England (Anglican) in their teaching document *Marriage* (1999) expresses a similar view, although the emphasis is on the process of learning to grow in love:

Marriage is a pattern that God has given in creation, deeply rooted in our social instincts, through which a man and a woman may learn love together over the course of their lives. We marry not only because we love, but to be helped to love....When publicly and lawfully we enter into marriage, we commit ourselves to live and grow together in this love (Marriage 1999:7).

The Roman Catholic approach to marriage preparation in theory if not in practice is sufficiently different from the Protestant approach as indicated above to justify a separate mention. In short, marriage preparation for Roman Catholics start with the teachings of the Church on the family as communicated through catechesis and teenage programmes, where the sanctity of the family and marriage is conveyed. This is referred to as “Remote Preparation” (Gavin 2004:57; Afer 1981:51), while “Proximate Preparation” takes place some months preceding the wedding and which includes the theology of marriage as a covenant and sacrament; marriage as relationship; sexuality and marriage; and the practical management of the household” (Afer 1981:52; Gavin 2004:106). “Immediate Preparation” is then the final stage of marriage preparation when the engaged couple come “to understand the meaning of the liturgical actions and the texts of the marriage ceremony” (Gavin 2004:113). In a seminal paper on marriage preparation Holmes (2004) sees the traditional Roman Catholic approach of remote, approximate and immediate preparation as similar to a pilgrimage with “way stations” that prepares the pilgrim “in a special way to celebrate the sacramental event that awaits them at the end of their catechumenal journey” (Holmes 2004:99,102). Interestingly, however, in his study of marriage preparation as practiced in Spain, Korea, Ireland and the United States, Gavin found that in all four regions the main focus remains on *immediate* preparation (Gavin 2004:148,155,158,188).

4. Approaches to Christian Marriage Preparation

4.1 Background to the review

As already noted above, Klassen (1983) had made the observation that subsequent to World War II premarital instructional counselling had become increasingly popular with the focus on “sexual adjustment, marital roles, in-law relationships, religious concerns; and relationship problems (e.g. conflict resolution and problem solving skills” (1983:73). Although there are individual differences amongst the Christian writers on marriage preparation consulted in the literature, it is possible to discern overall agreement as to the specific areas that require attention in a course of marriage preparation. In reviewing the literature I became aware that these themes of marriage preparation as reflected in the literature bore a discernable correspondence with the structure of our course at Christ Church, Constantia. Perhaps this is not so surprising since the origins of our course is to be found in the work done in this field

during the 1980s (*see* Chap. 1, sec. 2.2). The review that follows is therefore framed according to the broad themes of the Christ Church Constantia marriage preparation course, namely the “Influence of family and social background”; “Personality dispositions”; “Marital roles and responsibilities”; “Communication skills and conflict resolution”; “Love, sexuality and children” and “Christian marriage and spirituality”.

Of particular interest for me as a pastoral counsellor working within a post-modern framework was the fact that none of the marriage preparation writings reviewed reflected a particularly post-modernist stance. Consequently, the modernist values and perspectives that are portrayed in these writings tend to be held as universally true and right. This is so for both Roman Catholic and Protestant marriage preparation writers.

4.2 Influence of family and social background

For many writers on marriage preparation it is vital that each partner identifies the influence of family of origin in the shaping of their individuality as well as the possible differences of values and perceptions concerning marriage that may arise between the couples as a consequence of their respective family background. The work of Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson in this regard is particularly notable as they focused *exclusively* on the family of origin in their marriage preparation. In 1981 they published a seminal journal article on their approach to marriage preparation, specifically adopting the family systems perspective of the time “as the most useful way to make a bridge between past experience of being in a family and the expected experience of beginning a new family” (Mitchell & Anderson 1981:73-75). From the family system perspective, the identification of the couple’s possible emotional and psychological attachment to their families of origin is seen by these authors to be critical if the couple’s marriage is to work (Mitchell & Anderson 1981:81-82). In exploring the dynamics of the families of origin, Mitchell and Anderson (1981:84-85) in particular focused on attitudes about sexuality, the handling of money and the place of religion within their family of origin.

Anderson continued with this approach after Mitchell died in 1991 by publishing a full-length book in 1993 with Robert Fife on marriage preparation. The specific focus of their book revolves around the concept “*to cleave*” which is taken from the King James Version of Genesis 2:24: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” They argue that “*cleave*” carries both the meaning of “sticking or

adhering to” and “to sever, to part or disunite”. In effect this means that it is necessary “to cleave or separate oneself from one’s origins in order to cleave or attach to someone in the bonds of marriage” (Anderson & Fife 1993:14-15). For Anderson and Fife the metaphor “of one flesh” reflect their understanding that the modern bonds of marriage represent two people who leave father and mother to become united in a new bond and yet remain two distinctive identities (Anderson & Fife 1993:29-30). They conclude:

The freedom to make an emotional commitment to another human being and to accept that person’s claim on one’s life depends on letting go of and being released from or at least redefining the claims and commitments of our families of origin and our friends. The longer it takes to effect an emotional separation from our family and friends, the longer it will take to become married (Anderson & Fife 1993:34).

Anderson and Fife require of their couples in preparation for marriage to construct a genogram of their respective families with the object in mind of capturing the many family stories that reflect the special meanings of past remembrances (Anderson & Fife 1993: 35-36). What is notable about their approach is that it has a strongly narrative flavour. They make the point that:

Families tell stories in order to maintain their foundational beliefs, sustain their unique identity, and reaffirm their common values. Even when we come from families that do not tell stories, every family has a history that is itself a narrative that will reveal its beliefs and values. When two people marry, they embark on a new story that incorporates the narratives from their past.... Telling family stories is a critical part of the process of becoming married because it is a way for the couple to weave together their new story while at the same time preserving the thread of each separate narrative (Anderson & Fife 1993: 37-38).

Norma Wood and Herbert Stroup (1990:113) had similarly based their premarital counselling course on Bowenian family systems theory, inviting the couples to examine their relationship “by studying each partner’s ‘family of origin’ system”. Each partner is required to draw their family genogram back to paternal and maternal grandparents and then to consider their family culture and values in terms of finances, religion, emotional relating, power and authority as well as freedom of individuality, sexuality (1990:113-115).

An earlier writer, David Lawson (1983), had a similar approach to marriage preparation in that he viewed the “differentiation of the self” as being “particularly critical in premarital preparation as it is a requisite for healthy and growth engendering functioning in the newly-formed family system” (1983:57-58). The work of marriage preparation, according to Lawson, is to aid

the couple in “rebalancing relationships within their family of origin without severing family bonds” (Lawson 1983:59). This approach involves the exploration of relationships in the family of origin, including family rules, and the extent to which the process of self differentiation has taken place thereby enabling the couple “to determine their own structure for family functioning” (Lawson 1983:60-61).

Other marriage preparation writers have also included the influence of the family of origin in the couple’s discovery of their own identity and values but as only part of their marriage preparation courses.

Of the earlier writers Mace (1972) had insisted that marriage preparation starts with each partner finding out who they are by first identifying their family background before going on to consider their social adjustment, education, spirituality, sexuality and physical and mental well-being (Mace 1972:46-53).

Claude Guldner (1977:252.254), who had developed a seven-session marriage preparation course after evaluating premarital counselling training courses during the late 1960s, devoted the third session to what he called the couples’ “self-system”, which would have “emerged in the families of origin”. Couples are also required to look at the best and the worse life experience they ever had and how they had coped with it.

Charles Wood (1979) developed a set of questions around family background, symbols of power and value (money, education, and career), sexuality, religion and personal identity. The purpose of the questions are to invite “the couple to see that in all facets of similarity and differences the events of their relationship are at the same time capable of being obstacles to the relationship and opportunities for the development of the relationship” (Wood 1979:46).

Interestingly Michael Foley (1981) in his book on marriage preparation positioned his approach on the assumption that “many of the traditional customs, values and practices surrounding the family are being called into question”. Furthermore, according to his view, couples often live away from the support of family and childhood communities, and since both husband and wife are out in the work place and women “have a right to develop as people”, traditional roles within the family need “be negotiated according to the different situations which prevail in each marriage” (Foley 1981:2-6).

Klassen’s (1983) premarital counselling model focuses on discussing seven areas with the couple, starting with the area of family background as critical

role model and influence in the lives of the couple (Klassen 1983:73-74), while Rolfe (1985:164) made the argument for Christian marriage preparation as a time to assess the dynamics of the couple's relationship in terms of their family heritages.

Of the other later marriage preparation writers, Wilson (1991) requires of a couple preparing for marriage that they fill out a Premarital Awareness Inventory which provides general background to each partner and forms the basis for further exploration of each individual's personal life journey by taking a closer look at their family of origin relationships. Whether Wilson consciously so intended is not clear, but his Premarital Awareness Inventory has a notably social constructionist flavour. According to him the point of the exercise is to provide "a structured context in which couples can share their 'story' [as] a sacred opportunity" while teaching "the couple the richness which can exist in the diversity of perceptions and perspectives". In particular it is his position that "the perceptions that others have of us, significantly influence the parameters of our relationships", which is why "the importance of each person listening to the other's story cannot be over-emphasized" (Wilson 1991:121-122).

Giblin (1994:155) focuses in fact *two* of his four marriage preparation sessions on the family of origin as the model for "relational intimacy". He argues that although many modern couples "may assume they are beyond the influence of such factors ... we continue to carry 'invisible loyalties', the images and patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving from the past". To this end Giblin also requires a genogram to be drawn that is intended to identify how the "models of being male and female, father and mother, husband and wife" may have influenced the couple partners.

Krömker (1994:28,29) in his marriage preparation course, focuses specifically on the couples identifying the *expectations* that they may have acquired from their families of origin and then alerting them to consider in the light of this awareness what they could realistically expect in their marriage.

In her guide for Marriage Sponsor Couples, Mary Ann Paulukonis (1995:23-26) devotes the first of her four-session marriage preparation course to placing marriage within the context of the Christian family, which is seen as a reflection of the relational life of the Trinity. This relational aspect of the family can therefore be seen as a developing system where each engaged person is part of their family of origin, where they have learnt different

responses to people and circumstance. The couple needs to appreciate these differences and where necessary to modify these responses in order to develop a healthy family where there is good communication, trust, respect, sharing and responsibility. An important aspect of the family life cycle, according to Paulukonis, is that change is a normal and inevitable factor in every family as the life cycle passes from the newly-wed family through to the young family, adolescent, midlife and finally aging family.

4.3 Personality dispositions

It is notable that not many of the marriage preparation writers under review give much time, if any, to the impact or otherwise of personality disposition on the marriage. In fact, it is only Krömker (1994:23-25, 27-28, 30-31), who in his Master's dissertation identifies personality as a critical element to be considered by couples preparing for marriage and he follows the four-temperament model of Tim La Haye (1991:31-96) and Arnold Mol (1981:29-43) which include the four temperaments of *melancholy*, *phlegmatic*, *choleric* and *sanguine*. Krömker does point out that there is a danger of labelling people as it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. For Krömker temperament analysis is seen only as indicator of where the focus should be in the relationship.

Guldner (1977:254) does not specifically speak of personality although his third session is devoted to the couples "as persons their *self-systems*" (author's emphasis), although he specifically links the shaping of the self-system to their families of origin. Klassen (1983:76-77) is concerned with the impact of the couple's self-esteem on their relationship and he quotes the social science research of his day to the effect that good self-esteem predicts a good quality of marital life. In this regard it is interesting to note that the more recent quantitative research of Murray et al (2001) suggests that partners with a negative self-image invariably underestimate the affection they are receiving which leads to unsatisfactory relationships.

Mace (1972:45) asks his premarital couples to explore how well they know themselves: "who you are, how you came to be what you are, where you stand now, and what you are asking of life?" These questions are explored within the context of evaluating their family background, while taking a critical look at their social adjustment and intellectual, vocational and spiritual development. Furthermore, the couple are requested to consider their past sexual experiences and attitude towards their own sexuality as well as their past love relationships (Mace 1972:46-53). It is interesting that Mace does not offer a

personality framework within which the couple could undertake this self exploration, although when he gets the couple to explore the nature of their relationship he refers to “temperament differences” such as introversion-extraversion as a possible future source for conflict (Mace 1972:58-59).

Although Foley (1981:29) does not include personality in general as part of his marriage preparation, he does refer, as will be noted below (*see* sec. 4.4), to traditional differences between men and women in psychological terms.

4.4 Marital roles and responsibilities

The issue of *marital roles* in the home versus career receives considerable attention from Christian writers on marriage preparation and it is notable that although the liberation of women in the home and the workplace is acknowledged, marriage preparation writers still see that attitudes and expectations concerning respective roles and responsibilities of husband and wife in the home and workplace need to be understood and negotiated.

Mace (1972:62-67) has couples identify their individual expectations and goals for their marriage and then discusses how these expectations may need to be altered, adjusted or even dropped if in conflict with the building of a unified marital relationship. Couples are encouraged to recognise that “*no close relationship can be achieved and maintained in any other way than by resolving the conflict which it inevitably produces*” (Mace: 1972:66) (emphasis by Mace).

Although the fourth session of Guldner’s (1977:254) marriage preparation course is assigned to marital activities, which include a wide range of issues such as housekeeping and routines, budget, food, relationship with others, religious activities and self-development, there is no indication that the role of husband and wife in relation to these activities is actually considered.

Although Foley (1981:25-32) also alludes to the social revolution of the emancipation of women, he insists that if the future husband and wife are to be equal partners then the differences between the sexes and personalities need to be understood and recognized by the couple preparing for marriage. Foley’s position is that there is still considerable ignorance concerning the effects of a woman’s reproductive physiology (menstruation and childbearing) on her personhood requiring the sympathy and understanding of the husband. Although Foley is cautious not to generalise as to psychological differences between men and women, he does go on to take a modernist position and claims that men “tend” to be concerned with ideas and theories while women

are more people-centred and men are more functional whereas women are more concerned with beauty than utility. Foley admits, however, that differences as to the expression of feelings has as much to do with social conditioning as so-called gender differences, where boys are brought up not to show their feelings.

Klassen (1983:75,77) is of the view that to avoid later misunderstandings in the marriage, role clarification for the couple is encouraged. He points to the change in the traditional work and domestic roles within marriage and the need for the premarital couple to clarify their personal role expectations as future husband and wife. Rolfe (1985: 167) requires of couples preparing for marriage to look at and discuss their expectations of marriage, children, leisure time and friends.

In her book on a parish team approach to marriage preparation Margaret Grimer (1986:25) stresses the importance of really listening to the couple being prepared for marriage. She points to research that indicates couples often think they share domestic roles but in reality the wife still carries the greater burden within the home and therefore the premarital couple need to clearly identify their role expectations in the light of the model of the parents as well as current social trends. Couples should be open to negotiate their roles as husband and wife within the home as well as the attitudes they hold regarding their respective working life. In particular, care needs to be taken that the value of equality in the workplace is not mere lip-service, but that there is a clear understanding of the impact of work life on the home (Grimer 1986:46-48).

Wilson's (1991:121-122) approach to marriage preparation has a distinctive post-modern flavour in that he points out that "the perceptions that others have of us, significantly influence the parameters of our relationships". This is why for him "the importance of each person listening to the other's story cannot be over-emphasized". His premarital counselling program would then include the couple exploring their respective external relationships (with family, friends) and internal relationships (regarding marital roles, sexuality, family planning and communication skills) (Wilson 1991:123-124).

Giblin (1994: 154-155), who writes from the perspective of pastoral care within the United States context and claims experience in both research and practice regarding premarital programs, devotes two full sessions of his marriage preparation course on the couples discussing and clarifying their *expectations*,

realistic and unrealistic, of marriage. This process would involve examining the models that they had learned from their families of origin.

4.5 Communication skills and conflict resolution

Communication in the marital relationship and in particular the resolving of conflict receives consideration attention by a number of marriage preparation writers.

Foley (1981:33) is quite clear that “one of the most necessary elements in a satisfactory marriage is good communication” and that this “gets to the very heart of what marriage is all about”. For Foley the difficulty of communication between husband and wife is seen within the context of the newly-wed couple adjusting to one another while living under the daily pressures of working, which often leaves the couple too tired at the end of the day to communicate effectively (Foley 1981:34-35). While pregnancy and the arrival of children ideally should help cement the couple’s relationship, often these changed circumstances “poses new challenges to their relationship”. According to Foley the husband may “feel threatened” by the new mother’s absorption with her baby. Whether one agrees with this gender generalisation or not there is no doubt that the previous one-to-one relationship of the couple can only be maintained with the arrival of children by making time to communicate at an intimate level (Foley 1981:35-36).

For Klassen (1983:76) the quality of marriage is dependent on effective communication and therefore he argues that it is necessary for the premarital couple to identify any faulty communication between them. Interestingly, Klassen refers to social science research of his day to support his arguments. He cites a study by Schulman (1974) that faulty communication can often be found to be at the root of the couple’s misconceptions of one another. Of particular importance for Klassen (1983:77) is the connection between communication and self-esteem and he quotes Miller, Corrales and Wackman (1975) to the effect that “by the way people communicate to each other, they are demonstrating their intention to maintain and build, or to destroy, their own and the other person’s esteem”. As regards communication and conflict resolution, Klassen (1983:76-77) refers to the findings of Knudson, Sommers and Golding (1980) that there is a direct correlation between couple’s access to one another’s interpersonal perceptions and their ability to resolve conflict.

According to Fr. John Thomas and Fr. David Thomas⁴ (1994), good marital communication involves giving attention to a number of factors, including that both parties are clear about the meaning of words used between them; acknowledging and respecting the feelings of one another; adopting a non-judgmental and open acceptance of the other person in the relationship and avoiding accusations (Thomas & Thomas 1994:92-95). They draw attention to the importance of body language in communication and recommend touch one of the most powerful forms of communication in marriage (Thomas & Thomas 1994:97-98). Constructive conflict resolution requires the avoidance of negative tactics such as the silent treatment; lower the emotional temperature by postponing the argument; stay focused on the issue at hand; and to refrain from dragging past issues into the present argument. Couples are urged to *listen* before responding and to keep a measured, calm tone to their voices (Thomas & Thomas 1994: 98-100).

Giblin (1994:152-153) similarly links “effective marital functioning” to skilful communication and conflict resolution in the marriage and he identifies the need for self-disclosure in the relationship and taking the risk of speaking one’s heart to one’s partner, sharing feelings, even anger. Good communication requires adopting active listening skills, seeking clarification when in doubt and using “I” statements to take ownership of one’s expressed feelings, values and ideas.

Although Paulukonis’ (1995:3) guide to marriage preparation is written from the perspective of the Marriage Sponsor Couples, “married couples who help engaged and newly married couples prepare for Christian marriage”, the aim of this guide is for engaged couples preparing for marriage to develop their communication skills as modelled by the Marriage Sponsor Couple. The communication skills modelled and practiced in the remaining three sessions include the communication skills of attending, reflective listening (labelling feelings and identifying content), responding (empathy, questioning and respect) and presenting (i.e. summarising, sharing self and confronting) (Paulukonis 1995:30-33,38-42,46-48).

The recent review article by writer Joan Groom (2001:49-50) on mostly Christian premarital programmes and some social science research studies, highlights that of all the factors that positively influence a stable marriage, which include social background and contextual factors as well individual

⁴ These writers were not related.

traits and behaviour, it is the couple's "interactional processes" that are of the greatest importance. According to her review, the greatest predictors of marital conflict are criticism, defensiveness, contempt and listener withdrawal (stonewalling) (Groom 2001:53). The counter to these negative interactional communication processes would be behaviour that includes "intimate" behaviour (affection and sex); "interactive" behaviour (conversation and courtesy); "instrumental" behaviour (personal care and household management) and "companionship" that includes recreation and joint activities (Groom 2001:52). To improve communication between marital couples, Groom cites with approval a communication tool known as "The Speaker-Listener Technique", which involves the speaker holding an object while speaking and the listener remaining silent until the object is passed on to them. The speaker may only speak for themselves and the listener is required to paraphrase what had been heard (Groom 2001:50). In addition, couples are encouraged to practice "social support", which includes "communication caring", the validation of the other's words, feelings and actions, and the provision of information, assistance and tangible resources (Groom 2001:51). Finally, Groom (2001:54) concludes "the fundamental need for the individuals in the relationship to recognize the role basis values such as courage, honesty, generosity and self restraint play in their interactions".

Although it had not been my intention to consult quantitative research with regard to my field of interest, Klassen's (1983) use of social science research had tweaked my curiosity as to what social psychologist research does have to say about close and marital relationships. I did therefore consult some studies in this regard, but mostly I am indebted to the work of Baron and Byrne (1994; 2003), who have comprehensively surveyed the field.

Relating to the field of marital conflict a study by Baxter (1990:84-87) was of notable interest as this quantitative research study asserted that conflict inevitably arises in intimate relationships where there are conflicting needs for closeness and independence; openness, honesty and privacy; and the comfort of predictability and the excitement of the unexpected.

In their earlier review of the research field of marriage Baron and Byrne (1994:340) observed that as the marital relationship deteriorates so the positive affirmations are replaced by rudeness, sarcasm, criticism and other negative messages. According to the research findings of Bradbury and

Fincham (1992:624) couples in conflict tend to blame one another and express negative evaluations of one another instead of trying to resolve their problems.

In a later review of the social psychology research on close relationships, Baron and Byrne (2003:337) noted work that echo some of the sentiments of the abovementioned Christian writers, namely that in situations of marital conflict, attacking your partner's positive self-evaluation should be avoided. Other research advise couples to rather pause and consider their actions before acting or speaking, to be empathic towards one another when arguing, and not to become hostile or defensive when they experience conflict in their relationship. A quantitative study from 2001 indicated that couples experience greater intimacy in their relationship when each partner feels understood and the interaction between them is pleasant, positive feelings are expressed and emotions and private information are disclosed (Baron and Byrne 2003:338).

4.6 Love, sexuality and children

4.6.1 Love

Interestingly not many of the writers on Christian marriage preparation consulted for this literature review pay particular attention to love and romance in the marriage. However, a number of social psychologist researchers have done research on love and marriage and so before taking a look at the marriage preparation writers on the topic, the quantitative social research in this field is first briefly reviewed. It should however be noted that this research does not appear to have taken into account the feminist liberation perspective of the past twenty-five years that has sought to understand the power relationships of patriarchy and to find ways to relate to one another that reflects our common humanity (Neuger & Poling 1997: 23-29).

In their earlier research review of social science studies of the field, Baron and Byrne (1994:312) ask what is meant by love and refer to Hatfield's (1981) work on "passionate love" that is characterised as sexual attraction and physical arousal for the loved person, a desire to be constantly in their presence and despair at separation and ending the relationship. Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) went on to develop the *Passionate Love Scale* that measured these emotional aspects of passionate love.

Some social science research has sought an explanation for the occurrence of *romantic love* by means of patriarchal, bio-evolutionary discourse that holds the view that attraction to the appropriate love object has to do with

reproduction and protection of the offspring (Baron & Byrne 1994:314). An alternative patriarchal discourse that is offered by social psychology research suggests that potential partners form a relationship based on an *equitable exchange*, with the emphasis of the *success* of the male being exchanged for the attractive attributes of the woman (Baron & Byrne 1994: 317).

Social science researchers also look to psychological explanations for romantic behaviour such as that the perceptions of one another tends to be favourably biased towards one owns *ideal self* while the virtues of the loved one are emphasised and any faults minimised. Accordingly, matching one's partner closely to the projected ideal ensures a happier relationship and stands a good chance of lasting (Baron & Byrne 2003:317). The research of Knee (1998:367) is interesting in this respect as it supports the theory that the relationship tends to be strengthened over time when a couple believe they are meant for one another.

In the late 1980s Robert Steinberg (1986:119-123) sought an explanation for what sustained long-lasting relationships, and notably marriages, and developed the *Triangular Model of Love* that measures the balance and presence of the love elements of *intimacy* (i.e. emotional closeness), *passion* (sexual attraction) and *decision/commitment* (reflecting the cognitive commitment to the relationship). The ideal form of love, *consummate love*, would be when all three of these components are in balance and equally strong (Baron & Byrne 1994:319-320; 2003:325). On the other hand, an earlier study in the 1980s of 351 couples married fifteen years or longer found that the couples ascribed the success of their marriages on the presence of friendship, commitment, similarity and positive affect (Baron & Byrne 1994:338). While a study in the mid-1990s identified "companionate love", i.e. activities that are shared, joint projects that are worked on, ideas that are exchanged and couples ability to laugh together, as ensuring marital satisfaction (Baron & Byrne 2003:333).

The presence of similarity in the relationship had also been identified by social psychology research as a positive contributor to a fulfilling and lasting relationship. Some research has actually identified that couples often enter a relationship assuming greater similarity of partners than actually exists. A longitudinal study during the early 1990s indicated that similarity of couples had remained constant over time from the time of their engagement through twenty years of married life (Baron & Byrne 2003:330-331). On the other hand,

some social science research discourse suggests that the very differences that initially had attracted later lead to disenchantment. Dissimilarities that cause marital conflict are not evident during the passionate love phase before marriage, but no matter how passionate the initial attraction, invariably differences and negative qualities become apparent between married couples and which over time tend to be less tolerated (Baron & Byrne 2003:335).

Returning to the Christian marriage preparation writers, of particular interest are the writings of Claude Guldner (1977), Michael Foley (1981), and John Thomas and David Thomas (1994). The latter three writers in particular see love in marriage as central to the modern marriage and they are concerned with the creation of intimacy and development of the personal relationship throughout the marriage.

Two of Guldner's (1977:254) seven-session marriage preparation course are relevant to love and marriage. The second session encourages the couple to explore "their attitudes regarding love and marriage", which includes companionship, sharing and affection. Session Five is intended to assist "the couple in exploring together the *feeling or emotional dimensions* of the relationship", which includes closeness and distance, dominance and submission, receiving and giving nurturance, and capacity for empathy.

Foley (1981:16-24) points to the loving relationship in marriage as a recent development in modern society. Previously marriage was seen as a contract between two people that necessitates duties and rights and with the man enjoying the greater rights. At the same time Foley is careful to define love in marriage not as a falling in love that implies merely a romantic, sexual relationship, but rather the adoption of conscious decisions each day to love your partner. Love is giving, not taking. To truly love in marriage, Foley says "we have to die to our selfish, single way of life in order to lead a new, shared life based on mutual self-giving" (Foley 1981:21). Foley concludes by referring to Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13: 4-7), acknowledging that this passage refers to all Christian relationships, but that it holds a particular meaning for married couples.

According to Thomas and Thomas (1994:32) we have been "created by the God of love with a huge desire to love and be loved". At the same time, as we enter adulthood, aware of our mortality and dependent on our own resources, we come to the realisation of our "ultimate aloneness". Although marriage offers relief of this pain of loneliness, the risk of love lies in becoming vulnerable as

we drop our personal defences, revealing our fears, hopes and weaknesses to our loved one (Thomas & Thomas 1994:33-34). Furthermore, “to fully love another”, Thomas and Thomas remind us that we must first love ourselves. If we enter marriage with a sense of personal inadequacy we are more likely to take than to give in the relationship (Thomas & Thomas 1994:35-36). In line with their argument, Thomas and Thomas characterise marital love as always being respectful towards one’s beloved; to give more than to take; to be discerning about our beloved’s real needs; to be fully committed to the other, and, where understanding moves into action for the other (Thomas & Thomas 1994:38-42).

4.6.2 *Sexuality*

Sexuality in marriage is included in the marriage preparation courses of a number of Christian authors writing in the main during the 1970s and 1980s on the subject. The theological point of departure for most of these writers is that:

In marriage God’s gifts of sex and affection find their true and lasting expression in an indissoluble relationship (ACSA Prayer Book 1989:458).

However, before attending to the marriage preparation literature where this relational approach to sexuality in marriage is described, it is of interest to once again note, when turning to social science research, the patriarchal discourse that holds men are more physical in their relationships than women. According to this discourse women are generally distressed when their male partners are not loving and protective towards them, whereas men are distressed when their female partners rejected them *sexually*. Other quantitative research on jealousy in intimate relationships similarly reflect the conventional discourse that men tend to become jealous in relation to sexual infidelity whereas women are inclined to jealousy and feel threatened when their partner becomes emotionally committed to someone else. One wonders to what extent this patriarchal discourse is reflected in the research findings of over 80 percent of United States college men reporting that they had sexual relations without any emotional commitment, while the same percentage of college women had reported they required emotional involvement as a prerequisite for sexual relations (Baron & Byrne 1994:324,337,340).

Of particular interest for Christian marriage preparation are those social science studies that highlight the growing number of young couples who are

engaged in premarital sexuality. Already during the 1980s research studies had noted how premarital sexuality had changed since the 1960s and that sex had become accepted as part of intimate relationships. This trend has continued as the age for first-time intercourse had dropped since the 1970s through to the 1990s for boys at seventeen years of age and sixteen for girls (Baron & Byrne 1994:324; 2003:326).

As to the role of sexuality in intimate relationship, the later review by Baron and Byrne (2003:332) is of some interest as they had reported that whereas at least 56 percent of cohabiting couples have sex at least twice a week, amongst married couples *sexual activity* declines within the first four years of *marriage* from 11 intercourse acts every four week to 7,5. Of particular note for Christian marriage preparation on sexuality is the earlier study by Udry (1980:324) that concluded “the rate of decline in frequency of intercourse is an inverse function of length of marriage. The fastest rate of decline is in the early years of marriage; the longer married, the slower the rate of decline.”

Returning to the Christian marriage preparation literature and the subject of sexuality in marriage, Mace’s (1972) *Getting Ready for Marriage*, is written from his perspective as a seasoned marriage counsellor and is set against the era of human sexuality studies by Masters and Johnson and the plethora of popular literature on mainly sexual techniques (Mace 1972:74-75). Mace welcomes this new openness concerning sexuality but suggests that couples should consider five areas of sexuality in marriage. Firstly, couples are urged to find out whether their sexual education is adequate and informative. Secondly, each partner should be comfortable about their own sexual nature, and thirdly, the couple need to be open with one another about their sexual feelings and responses. This discussion, fourthly, leads naturally to the couple seeking full agreement as to what satisfies them both sexually. Mace however insists, lastly, that sexuality in marriage is about the experience and not the performance (Mace 1972:76-79).

Although Jack Dominian writes from the perspective of marriage enrichment and therefore his writings have not been reviewed for this study, the fact that his views on sexuality are pertinent to the course at Christ Church, I have chosen to review a popular book that he co-authored with Edmund Flood in the earlier 1990s. In *The Everyday God* Dominian (1993:18) expresses the view that “married love is the means of salvation, the way people share in God’s activity” and the healing of our wounds of feeling unloved, insecure, anxiousness and

even paranoia and depression can take place in marriage through mutual respect, kindness, reliability trustworthiness and understanding (Dominian 1993:41-50). Consequently, for Dominian the sexual act is in the first place an affirmation of one another as important and significant. Secondly, through sexual intercourse the couple fully experience their femininity and masculinity. Thirdly, the sexual act “can become on certain occasions a means of reconciliation”. Fourthly, in the recurrent coming together as husband and wife in a sexual union they experience “hope that another human being recognises our existence”. And, lastly, through sexual intercourse the couple are giving recurrent thanks to each other for being together (Dominian 1993:60-61). In this total giving to one another, not only physically but with their whole being, the couple is engaged in “an expression of prayer” since true prayer is total self-giving (Dominian 1993:62).

The sixth session of Guldner’s (1977:254-255) marriage preparation course is dedicated to exploring the sexual relationship. In Guldner’s opinion it was necessary to provide “accurate information on human sexual function” no matter “how sophisticated” the couples may be. The couples are required to explore “the ABCs of sex: attitudes, behaviour, and communication” as well as “family planning and contraception”.

The premarital counselling model of Wood (1979:48) includes sexuality as one of six counselling sessions for couples preparing for marriage. In his article he poses a number of questions for consideration by couples during these sessions. His questions on sexuality focus on the couple’s initial introduction and understanding of their sexuality within the context of their family, their own early experiences of their sexuality and what experiences they had dating. The final questions probe the nature of the couple’s present sexual experience, looking at assertiveness and aggression, affection or lack thereof, modesty, talking openly or not about each others sexual needs, and finally, their attitude regarding parenthood and contraception.

Foley (1981) is writing similarly within the context of the so-called new permissive culture of the post-war society but his point of departure on this subject is that sexual intercourse as “an expression of love between two people who are committed to each other in a shared life” is reserved solely for marriage (Foley 1981:42). Foley is a man of his time and his views reflect those of his society. For him the sexual relationship of the couple starts with the understanding that the woman’s “sexual energy is linked up with [her]

domestic and material activities” and that her sexual satisfaction is dependent on her husband fulfilling his role “as provider, protector and supporter or co-parent” (Foley 1981:45). The emphasis is placed on the husband being attentive to his wife, stimulating her during fore-play, and not falling asleep after sexual intercourse. It is important for Foley that couples communicate openly about their sexual feelings and needs within the context of their relationship (Foley 1981:46-49).

The African Bishops at the Rome Synod of 1981 (Afer 1981:19-20), expressed the view that the Roman Catholic Church required to teach a positive theology of human sexuality. For them this theology is underscored by five points – firstly that “sexuality is a gift from God”; secondly that “sexuality is a relational power”; thirdly that “sexuality is not identical with genitality (*sic*)”; fourthly that sexuality is a holistic expression of self-giving; and finally that this theology of sexuality necessitates the prohibition against premarital sex, contraception and divorce in order to safeguard the positive value of Christian marital sexuality.

Referring to research concerning marital problems and sexuality current at the time of his writing, Klassen (1983:75) suggests that a premarital course should include the physiology of sex and the sexual act as well as family planning and contraception. At the same time, the premarital counsellor should explore the couples’ sexual background to determine whether there is a conflict between their religion and sexuality.

The starting point for Thomas and Thomas (1994) on this subject is that “[s]ex is not only something we do; sex is something we are”, implying “the integrating of love, trust and commitment into our sexuality”. However, if we allow our sexuality to control, hurt or to manipulate the other, then sexuality loses “its power for good” (Thomas & Thomas 1994:108-109). Although Thomas and Thomas acknowledge that sexual roles have loosened up in the latter half of the 20th century, they still hold to the gender difference between men and women, maintaining that men tend to be more goal-focused and career-orientated while women are more sensitive as to how the goal is achieved and are more relationship determined. In their view these differences are best worked out between a particular man and a particular woman (Thomas & Thomas 1994:110-111). For Thomas and Thomas sexual fidelity in marriage is not a matter of restriction or burden but “actually a freeing up of each person to fully relate sexually, without fear of rejection or betrayal” while,

the “first ‘fruit’ of married love” is the child conceived from this sexual union between husband and wife (Thomas & Thomas 1994:111-113). The authors go into sexual biology in some detail (Thomas & Thomas 1994:113-118) and then conclude with some practical suggestions concerning the right atmosphere and setting, talking, frequency and duration and techniques, concluding “the best overall setting for lovemaking is committed marriage” (Thomas & Thomas 1994:119-122).

4.6.3 *Parenthood and children*

Of the writers on marriage preparation reviewed, only the Roman Catholic writers Michael Foley (1981) and John Thomas and David Thomas (1994) have included parenthood as part of their preparation of premarital couples.

According to Foley (1981:52) “[c]onsidering parenthood is a very important aspect of marriage preparation”. He approaches the subject from the perspective of Roman Catholic family planning and responsible parenthood, which is based on “the belief that through marriage we are called to collaborate with God in bringing new life into the world” (Foley 1981:54). Accordingly Foley counsels the premarital couple to plan their family for when they have had time to establish a “solid and stable relationship” and when they are financially able to take care of their family (1981:54-55). Although Foley cites opinion polls that indicate Roman Catholic couples do use artificial methods of birth control, he advises the ovulation method as the safest natural way while advising couples in the United States to partake in the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council’s programmes on natural contraception. Foley tries to place the modern Roman Catholic couple’s dilemma regarding family planning within a theological context (Foley 1981:58-59):

The difficulties which a couple experience in the area of family planning as they attempt to exercise responsible parenthood are a reflection of the whole of married life.... In Christian terms it means they experience both the cross and the resurrection.

To my mind, this is a rather specious argument which contradicts his earlier admission that theology and the realities of the modern, industrial society should be “closely related” (Foley 1981:54).

In keeping with the view of Pope John Paul II that marital love “is not exhausted by the communion between husband and wife, but it is destined to continue raising up new life” (1994:133), Thomas and Thomas (1994) similarly counsel marriage preparation couples to limit the number of children

according to their income as well as the well-being of the family, but advise them to adhere to the Roman Catholic Church's teaching concerning Natural Family Planning (Thomas & Thomas 1994:127-136). Couples who cannot conceive and for whom "the desire to do so is all the greater" are advised to first seek medical help and then to consider adoption or fostering. They warn childless couples not to be "tempted to turn inward, to feel sorry for themselves, or to pursue a lifestyle of self-centeredness", but rather to express their fruitfulness through service to others (Thomas & Thomas 1994:137-140).

The birth of the first child changes everything in the life of the young couple, according to Thomas and Thomas and they advise couples to talk about their feelings and to establish the ground rules for their future life together. It is important that there is clarity concerning their roles as mother and father while taking care that their relationship as wife and husband do not suffer accordingly. The young infant's needs do come first, but it is essential that the young parents also enjoy time on their own. Help from the extended family and friends is indispensable, but they probably need to be invited to do so (Thomas & Thomas 1994:140-142).

4.7. Christian marriage and spirituality

As is to be expected, religion and the teachings of the church concerning marriage and the spirituality of marriage forms part of marriage preparation for most writers.

The *purpose* of marriage preparation, according to Parsons (1967:5), is to bring the couple to "commitment to faith in Christ, and life in his Church, which is the only true basis to a successful and happy marriage". Although Mitchell and Anderson (1981:85) agree that the place of religion in family life is important, they advise not to confront couples directly concerning their faith but rather to encourage a discussion on the role of religion in each family of origin. Wood (1979:48-49) on the other hand is quite explicit about the role of religion in the life of the couple preparing for marriage as he posed questions such as the role the church in their families of origin and how they intend to live their devotional life. The African Bishops at the Rome Synod of 1981 are similarly unambiguous in their theology of marriage and faith as they link the human need for intimacy to the Paschal Mystery where the couple "must die to the 'old' person in themselves and in their relationship, in order to be born again as 'new' persons with a new and deeper love" (Afer 1981:21).

Foley (1981:69-75) is quite clear about his belief that marriage is a Christian vocation where the demands of married life and the limitations on our personal freedom become opportunities to live a life of love and service. The Christian marriage is the basic Christian community, living a life of mutual love, devotion and service to others, thereby witnessing to the world that this is a Christ-centred family.

Klassen (1983:74) on the other hand is open to couples preparing for marriage who do *not* share the same religious affiliation or faith. Apart from trying to help them to “build a satisfying relationship vis-à-vis their religious diversity”, Klassen points to discussions concerning death, lifestyle and attitudes towards the future as matters of *spirituality* if not religion. Grimer (1986:52-62) makes the point that couples who choose to marry in a Christian church “are entitled to know what their wedding signifies to the Christian community”. Rather than focusing on religion, however, Grimer suggests three exercises for couples to explore the spirituality of their relationship in terms of identifying special moments, helping one another and seeking reconciliation in conflict.

For Rolfe (1983:239-240) the spiritual preparation of premarital couples is a matter of “review and consolidation - not teaching or evangelising”. The review would involve the Church’s teachings about marriage as “a permanent covenant in which God is involved, both in making and living the covenant”.

Krömker (1994:15-18; 20), whose faith is rooted in the Baptist tradition, sees marriage as instituted by God with the husband as the head of the family and the wife submitting to his authority out of respect for him and for God. The husband must though earn this respect by loving his wife and not embitter his children. Krömker foresees religious differences as a potential source of conflict in marriage that need to be dealt with during marriage preparation (Krömker 1994:20).

Giblin (1994:153; 156-157) insists that Christian couples should relate their marriage to their faith experience since “marital spirituality is about God’s immanent presence and voice in both partner’s lives”. Referring back to the couple’s genogram, Giblin would have the couple explore their family of origin stories relating to the images of God as well as their experience of love, acceptance and forgiveness and the place of prayer, Scripture, quiet times and meditation in their families of origin. If the couple is not particularly religious, Giblin would explore their reverence for creation and their sense of the

purpose of life (vocation), gratefulness (Eucharist and grace), community (the Church), forgiveness (reconciliation) and mystery.

Thomas and Thomas (1994:162-168) urge young couples preparing for marriage “to look to Jesus as a model of love that is life-giving in the fullest possible way” and in so doing Christian marriage becomes a sacramental symbol of God’s love and presence in human life. The couple are the sacrament to each other through their self-giving to one another as well as a sacrament to the world, witnessing their love relationship. In this sense, the spirituality of marriage is then reflected in the ordinary events of married life where the loving relationship is lived by means of mutual respect, discipline and sacrifice.

Paulukonis (1995: 35-36) describes “[s]pirituality as our way of relating to God” and therefore sees spirituality in our relating even if we ignore God and, similarly, marital spirituality exists whether the couple is specifically religious or not. The foundation for a person’s spirituality is reflected in Jesus’ commandment to love your neighbour as yourself, which involves acceptance of self and respect for God’s creation. Apart from each marital partner’s personal spirituality, the couple’s spirituality is reflected in “their dying and rising with Jesus through their marriage, their recognition of the sacred in the ordinary married lives, and their faithfulness to God by being faithful to each other”.

5. Reflective Summary

Reflecting on my literature review, it is notable, in the first place, that Christian marriage preparation is rooted in the theological position that marriage is “a God-given institution” (Krömker 1994:5), that “is communion of the deepest sort” (ACSA 1989:457) where the couple helps one another to love (Marriage 1999:7).

Secondly, the interest in marriage preparation during the latter half of the 20th century would seem to have been in response to the perceived crisis of marriage, notably in the light of the escalating divorce rate. Christian writers had become fearful that marriage was breaking down on an unprecedented scale (Mace 1975:9). At the same time, the purported changing nature of modern marriage with its greater emphasis on the relationship had seen Christian marriage preparation writers focusing on how to help couples “with learning how to cope with change and acquiring and developing the necessary skills with which to build up their relationships” (Stevens 1986:4).

My review of the literature had also shown that marriage preparation had increasingly become focused on “sexual adjustment, marital roles, in-law relationships, religious concerns”; and “relationship problems (e.g. conflict resolution and problem solving skills” (Klassen 1983:73). Accordingly, I took note of some quantitative research in the field of human relations as it pertains to my study focus.

What had been striking about the social science literature on intimate and marital relationships is that it is cast in the modernist mould of scientific discourse, of research studies using quantitative methodology set out to prove or disprove propositions concerning marital and close relationships. Perhaps the most striking feature of this literature from the qualitative perspective of my study is that these research studies are based on what is common to the proposition and the identified behaviour is accordingly predicted, classified and interpreted (Monk 1997:24-25). The exceptional and the marginalized would therefore not feature. Although I find these studies to be of interest and even valuable, they only point to one possible truth. There is always room for yet another view.

In Chapters Three and Four the results of my eleven interviews with the couples that were selected at random from the eleven marriage preparation courses over a period of three years are reviewed and analysed and some preliminary conclusions made based on this analysis. In the last chapter of this research study, Chapter Five, the consequences of these conclusions are considered in the light of the literature together with a number of recommendations regarding the possible future design of the present marriage preparation course at Christ Church Constantia.

Chapter Three

Preparing for Marriage:

Personality, Roles and Responsibilities, and Communication

1. Reporting on my research findings

As indicated at the end of Chapter One, in this and the following chapter I reflect on the Christ Church Marriage Preparation Course as it had been experienced by the couples interviewed for this case study. The focus of my research has been the Course, seeking through the interviews to understand whether the *contents* and *processes* of the Course had or had not been experienced as meaningful and helpful for those couples preparing themselves for a Christian marriage.

As this is qualitative case study, I have endeavoured to reflect in my writing the story of the Marriage Preparation Course as be told through the voices of its participants, the premarital couples. However, although I have been guided by the couples' telling of their stories of the Course – stories that are selections of their experiences (Payne 2000:29) – the decision as to “what is necessary for an understanding” of the “case’s own story” has been mine (Stake 1994:240).

The report on my research findings comes in three parts. Firstly, I place my research findings in context by briefly outlining the purpose and contents of the session under review. It is felt that the reader would be better placed to appreciate the summarised report on a particular session if the broad content of that session is known to them. Secondly, I then *summarise* the conversations with the 11 couples concerning each particular session, noting as far as possible (dominant) similarities as well as (subjugated) alternative views. This summary is a reflection of my understanding of what the interviewed couples had considered to be important about a particular session. Where relevant, comparisons with similar processes in marriage preparation literature or positions held concerning these situations from the literature are highlighted (Stake 1994:241). Finally, I conclude each session by reflecting briefly on these summaries, often with references to the literature, notably post-modern and narrative writings, where this seems to enrich my understanding or insight as to the meaning of a particular situation (Merriam 1998:19). Importantly, these reflections also become the basis from which I make my recommendations in Chapter Five concerning the possible future direction and shape of the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church.

The intention then in this chapter is to review *three* marriage preparation sessions “Knowing yourself; knowing your partner”; “Roles and responsibilities in marriage”; and “Communication, conflict and listening”, while the remaining two sessions, “Love, romance, sex and children” and “Growing together emotionally, spiritually”, as well as some general comments by the couples on the course as a whole are reviewed in Chapter Four.

2. The session: *Knowing yourself; knowing your partner*

2.1 Purpose of this session

The purpose of the session *Knowing yourself; knowing your partner* has been to afford couples the opportunity to consider the possible differences, styles, etc. in their personalities and how this may or may not impact on their relationship. Furthermore, couples have been encouraged to identify particular strengths, gifts, and values that each partner brings to the relationship. As a warm-up exercise, their family tree homework is discussed and couples are asked to share in group whether they had discovered any interesting aspects about each other’s families that they had not previously known about each other. The overall aim of the session has been to encourage couples to adopt a more critical self-evaluation stance, which hopefully will contribute to a vital, dynamic marital relationship that will continue to be fresh, present, and alive to the creative energy of the Spirit of life.

2.2 The session content

The various exercises offered and the theoretical contribution made during this session by the course facilitator are intended to allow couples an understanding of how they compliment one another, both in what they hold common as well in their differences.

In the original course as developed by the rector of my faith community, Keith, couples were asked to compare ten listed items (e.g. shoe size; favourite holiday, etc.) to determine how well they know each other. Although this first couple exercise was light in tone, it was nevertheless intended to bring to the couples’ attention that we do not know everything about our partner and that we change over time, particularly through the process of marriage. This point is further highlighted by means of another exercise in which couple partners are asked to describe themselves and their partner, using adjectives and short phrases, and to anticipate how their partner would describe them. The results

are discussed, first as a couple and then they are encouraged to share any insights within the large group.

In the later course, for which my wife and I had taken responsibility, after completing a similar light-hearted exercise testing how well they know each other, couples are introduced to “Johari’s Window”, a model for understanding how we reveal and hold back from others and how to learn about ourselves through feedback from others. Couples are then required for each partner to rate themselves and their partner in terms of a list of 16 values related to relationships (e.g. “Affirmation”; “Openness”; “Practical help”), which they afterwards compare with one another. Any general insights gained would be shared by each partner with the group, particularly any strength of their partner that they had identified in terms of their relationship. During the last part of the session couples are asked to consider to what extent their sense of self are similar and differ from one another, using various personality models, again asking couples to identify where they complement one another and strengthen the relationship.

In both versions of this course, couples were required to draw a family tree prior to attending this session, which reflected not only biological relationships but that also indicated interesting stories about family members.

2.3 The couples’ experience of the session

Of the 11 couples interviewed, six couples expressed the view that although they had known each other for a considerable period of time, either because of a long engagement or living together for some time, or in the case of one couple knowing each other for some 10 years, notwithstanding this the session had offered them the opportunity to *re-affirm* their knowledge of one another.

Individual stories that confirm this generalised view of the session include the couple who quipped humorously that this session had not produced any nasty surprises regarding each other and therefore could be viewed as a positive experience. Another couple commented specifically that this session’s exercises had affirmed their awareness that they were quite different as individuals. However, a further two couples expressed the view that since their families had shared similar social values and background, knowing each other within the context of these shared values were self-evident (*see* Reflections 2.4.1). For a number of the couples (seven out of the 11 couples interviewed, some overlapping with the above five), this session had offered them the opportunity not only to appreciate their similarities and differences as

individuals, but to view these similarities and differences as particular strengths that each of them brings to their relationship. Three of these couples specifically viewed the personality differences in their relationships as positive since they valued the strengths, values and perspectives of these differences. A further two couples of the seven made the discovery that one partner was the planner in the relationship whereas for a third couple this part of the session had affirmed positively what they had come to understand of one another. The partner of another couple had been awakened to a new awareness concerning his partner's caring nature and how this had positively impacted on their subsequent relationship, while the male partner of the seventh couple had experienced the personality exercise as "eye-opening". It is notable that both this individual as well as the male partner of the couple for whom the personality exercise had affirmed their knowledge of one another, would have welcomed the opportunity either during this session or at some later stage to further explore the implications of their relationship differences and strengths (*see Reflections 2.4.1*).

The *Family Tree* homework exercise had been a learning experience for five of the 11 interviewed couples. Some of the discoveries made were not necessarily of great significance for their relationship, such as learning about the average number of children born to a family. However, for one couple this exercise once again affirmed that their respective families handled conflict in quite different ways. This couple acknowledged that they had been shaped by the communication culture of their respective families in how they were handling conflict. Another partner came to the realisation that her family lived scattered around the world while his family were local and are close to one another. They recognised that this difference in family relationship could have some sort of impact on their future family relationships as a married couple. For two of the five couples the *Family Tree* exercise had sharpened issues concerning the values held by their families regarding divorce, thus acting as important role models for their own marriages (*see Reflections 2.4.2*).

Several writers on marriage preparation courses require of their premarital couples to construct a genogram (or family tree) of their respective families as a way of capturing their family stories (Anderson & Fife 1993:35-36) and discovering families values in respect of finances, religion, emotional relating, power and authority as well as freedom of individuality, sexuality (Wood & Stroup 1990:113-115). Giblin (1994:156-157) requires his premarital couples to explore their family stories by means of a genogram and in the process

revealing family images of God, their experience of love, acceptance and forgiveness and the place of prayer, Scripture, quiet times and meditation.

In contrast to these above-mentioned positive experiences of the session, the remainder of the interviewed couples were less enchanted with this session. For a start, two persons from a 2005 course, one male and one female, could not even recall this session or any of its exercises. Perhaps of greater significance is the fact that a further five individuals from these couples made the cogent point that because they had known each other for a considerable time, some even living together, they had not made any new discoveries about each other.

Interestingly, although a male partner from one of these couples claimed that he had become aware during the session that he and his future wife came from distinctly different cultural backgrounds, this then new-found discovery had not stayed with him during their difficult first year of marriage. Certainly his partner had expressed quite strongly that this session had not in any way alerted her to the stressful difficulties that she had to face in the months that followed their wedding.

In contrast to these dominant stories of disenchantment with this session, one female partner from this group expressed the view that although during the session she had not learnt anything new about her partner, ever since they were married she had been making new, exciting discoveries about her partner (*see Reflections 2.4.3*).

2.4 Reflections

Taking into account the above overview, the following reflections come to mind:

2.4.1 It would seem that for a good number of couples this session had offered them the opportunity to affirm and celebrate the knowledge they held of one another or to make discoveries as to their individual characteristics as strengths in the relationship. This in itself could be viewed as a worthy achievement as there is considerable comfort in having affirmed what you know about one another in the relationship. As noted above, the knowledges that couples hold of one another's self is seen by Wood (1979:49) as an opportunity for the couple to consider the implication of these knowledges for their relationship. In a recent quantitative study the view was posited that couples hold untapped

knowledge as to what they contribute towards marital satisfaction (Hicks et al 2004:98) (*see* Chap.5, Recommendation 3.1). Although, from a post-modern, narrative perspective, “this storying of experience [that] provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives” is gained at the price of excluding those experiences and knowledges that do not fit the dominant story (White & Epston 1990:10-11). It is therefore encouraging that a not insignificant number of couples (seven out of the 11 couples interviewed) had been able to move beyond their lived experience of one another (Bird 2000: 22) by coming to a renewed appreciation of the particular strengths that they bring to the relationship. This session had offered these couples an opportunity to further enrich and extend their knowledge of one another (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.2).

2.4.2 Furthermore, five couples (not necessarily overlapping with the aforementioned seven couples) had in particular experienced the drawing of the *Family Tree* exercise as stimulating some understanding concerning the influence of their families of origin in their shaping. They regarded this insight as beneficial for their relationship. As noted above, several marriage preparation writers have recommended the use of the family genogram to explore family influences. Two observations need to be made at this point. In the first place, this exploration of dominant family narratives by premarital couples, that may reveal family “ways of believing and behaving”, brings to mind the narrative approach to the telling of stories, a process through which new meaning could be made by discovering “previously un-storied events or by taking new meaning from already-storied events” (Freeman & Combs 1996:32). An example of making new meaning can be seen in the experience of the couple who had become aware of how they had been shaped by their respective family backgrounds with regards to the handling of conflict, but realized that they did not have to repeat the same pattern of behaviour. The adoption of a more focused approach to exploring family influence with premarital couples is considered further in Chapter Five (*see* Recommendation 3.1.3). The second observation that needs to be made is that the *Family Tree* exercise in this session and the *Influence of family* exercise in the following session, “Family influence and Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage”, cover the same ground. A

recommendation is made in this regard in Chapter Five (*see also* Recommendation 3.1.3)

2.4.3 Notwithstanding the above optimistic reflections on this session, it had also been noted in the above session review that a significant number of individuals had *not* experienced this session as sufficiently challenging. Two individuals could not recall this session, five couples had not made any new discoveries while for another the insight had been so short lived that he was unprepared for the challenge of their first year of marriage (*see sec.* 2.4.4). One of the factors that should be taken into account when considering the experiences of this group is the large number of couples who had made the specific point that they had already been in a long-term relationship and therefore knew each other quite well. The question that arises at this point is to what extent the present contents and structure of this session is sufficiently challenging for couples in long-term relationships. In Chapter Five I consider the need to factor into the design of the marriage course the apparent prevalence of couples in long-term relationships (*see* Recommendation 3.2.2).

2.4.4 The couple who had experienced considerable relationship difficulties during the first year of their marriage were particularly critical that the theoretical input and exercises of this session had not alerted them to dealing with these difficulties. On reflection it is doubtful that this couple could have been prepared within the context of the present marriage preparation course for the difficulties that they were to experience during their first year of marriage. The opportunity for meaningful interaction between the course facilitator and each couple is limited because of the group context of the course structure. It is therefore quite possible that significant relationship problems could remain hidden from the course facilitator and remain unchallenged. In Chapter Five consideration is given to providing each couple with an opportunity to directly interact with the course facilitator (*see* Recommendation 3.1.1).

3. The session: *Family influence and roles and responsibilities in marriage*

3.1 Purpose of this session

The aim of this session is two fold. In the first place, the couples are encouraged to consider to what extent, if any, they are still influenced by the behaviour of their parents and what the nature of that influence may be. Following on from this group discussion, the couples are then asked to consider what their preferred model of marriage is with regards to their respective roles and responsibilities as wife and husband. The intention is that the consideration of the first issue would prepare couples to come to an understanding of the second issue.

3.2 The session content

This session is introduced with some theoretical contribution by the course facilitator around the issue of how free the couples are to marry. The couples are then required to evaluate themselves against a list of questions pertaining to the degree of independence from their respective parents. Following on from this couple exercise, the group is asked to consider how parents may try to control or interfere in the lives of the couple. After considering the implications of “leaving” the parental home psychologically, emotionally and financially, the couples are asked, after some further input by the facilitator, to consider the biblical meaning of “cleaving” for the marital relationship in terms of emotional intimacy and support, openness and trust. In the later version of the course this concept is further explored, using David Mace’s model of the Minimum & Maximum Involvement Marriage (In the earlier version of the course Mace’s model had only been introduced during the Communication Session).

The second half of the session is then devoted to exploring the couples’ expectations concerning their future roles and responsibilities as husband and wife. After a short introduction on what is understood by roles and responsibilities, the group is divided into men and women and each sub-group discusses and lists what they consider to be the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife in today’s marriage. The two groups come together again and compare the men’s and women’s views. The session is concluded with the group discussing, firstly, to consider whether the qualities needed in the marriage are different for the husband than for the wife and vice versa and

how this relates to the traditional scriptural view of the husband as head of the family.

3.3 The Couples' experience of the session

3.3.1 Influence of family

Eight of the interviewed couples had in one way or another experienced this part of the session as useful. Six couples specifically expressed the view that they had come to a new understanding concerning their relationships with their parents, while a further two couples claimed that they had been fully aware of how they related to their families of origin but that this session did offer them the opportunity to consider these relationships afresh. On the other hand, three couples had expressed the view that in the light of their long-term relationship they had not come to any new insights concerning their relationship with their families of origin during this session. Significantly, all of the couples, directly or indirectly, had commented that they had participated in this part of the session primed with their knowledges of their families and family relationships.

When one looks specifically at the different stories relating to this session, notably a couple from one of the earlier 2004 courses could still recall how they had come to the realisation during this session that they shared a similar approach to managing their marriage and that they were both ready to “leave” their families. Another couple from this early period, who at the time of the interview had a baby girl, could recall that during this session they had discussed how they would try to maintain the delicate balance of accepting help from their parents, such as when they have a baby girl, and resisting such help if it felt too much like interference. For another couple this session had made them realise just how lucky they were in comparison with other couples and their troublesome family relationships. Family relationship was the concern of a couple marrying for a second time. This session had given them the opportunity to talk about the personalities of their respective families and the impact this had had in the past on their previous marriages. In regard to determining family relationship boundaries, one of the couples related that subsequent to being married the husband had put into practice what had been discussed on this issue when he informed his mother that if his wife was not welcome in his family home then neither was he. The last couple became aware at this session of how differently their families of origin communicated and that they as a couple tend to reflect this culture in their own communication

particularly when relating to their parents (and parents-in-law). Although the learnings for each of these six couples were different, it is apparent that for each of these couples there had been some sort of discovery concerning how they related to their families of origin (*see* Reflections 3.4.2).

The literature review in Chapter Two revealed that writers on marriage preparation have placed considerable emphasis on the influence of family in the shaping of the individual. Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson (1981:81-82) were particularly specific about couples' understanding their possible emotional and psychological attachment to their families of origin as part of their self identification process. In a later work co-authored with Robert Fife, Herbert Anderson (1993:34) maintains that the independence of couple's marriage is dependant on letting go and redefining the emotional claims and commitments of their families of origin. They believe that this redefinition is done by relating each couple's family story, revealing family beliefs and values while weaving together a new story for the couple (Anderson & Fife 1993:37-38). David Lawson (1983:57,60) requires premarital couples to explore their self differentiation by looking at relationships and family rules in their families of origin and Wood and Stroup (1990:113-115) have their couples examine the influence of family culture and values in terms of finances, religion, emotional relating, power and authority and sexuality. Other earlier writers, one way or another, in the same way include in their marriage preparation courses the exploration of the influence of the family of origin as part of the couple discovering their own identity and values (Mace 1972:46; Guldner 1977:254; Wood 1979:46; Klassen 1983:73; and Rolfe 1985:164) and later writers continue on a similar theme (Wilson 1991:122; Giblin 1994:155; Krömker 1994:28; and Paulukonis 1995:23-26).

3.3.2 *Roles and responsibilities in marriage*

For nine of the 11 couples interviewed, although not necessarily the same couples referred to in the previous paragraph, the exercises and discussions regarding roles and responsibilities in marriage had in one way or another afforded them an opportunity to consider their views and positions on these issues.

Looking at the individual stories, firstly, there is the couple noted above who shared the same approach to managing their marriage, had after this session undertaken to always be respectful towards one another and not to undermine one another in public. The couple with the baby girl claimed that their future

roles and responsibilities in marriage had been an important issue for them during the session discussion, as well as afterwards, and that at the time they had discussed at length the possible impact that a baby may have on their respective roles as wife and husband. For a further two couples, the couple exercise as well as the group discussion offered ample opportunity to consider their own views on the matter in the light of views and experiences of the other couples in the group. One of these couples, who had discovered how they were influenced by the communication styles of their families of origin, expressed their appreciation at been given the opportunity to talk about their roles and responsibilities in marriage, although they had wondered during the interview how longer-term challenges could change their views and perspective on this issue.

A male partner, who came across during the interview as particularly confident with regards to his marriage, did concede that although at the time of this session they were already clear about their roles and responsibilities, they did make some unspecified adjustments subsequent to the session to these views. The male partner, who in the previous session had spoken of becoming aware of the cultural differences between him and his fiancé, maintained that it was during this session that the huge responsibility of taking on a wife *and* a 13-year old daughter had become a reality for him in terms of his contemplated future role as husband and father. His partner expressed the view that she had been in agreement at the time of the group discussion on the issue of roles and responsibilities, but in the light of her own first year of marriage felt that it would take time for these matters to be worked out in practice.

For the male partner of another couple, the gender group exercise had alerted him to the possibility that his future wife may not return to her work as they both had believed but, rather, could take on the role of homemaker and stay-at-home mother. Another interesting issue that arose for this couple was their experience of the roles and responsibilities exercise where the men had identified the male as the “lion-hunter” whilst the women in their group had focused on the caregiver role of the wife. The female partner of this couple at the time had felt that her minority opinion that the care-giving role should not be confined to the wife had been ignored and accordingly marginalized. This couple were of the opinion that the wife’s depression during the first year of their marriage could partly be attributed to her confusion as to what her role should be in the marriage (*see also* Chap. 4, sec. 4.3.3).

It had noted in the Chapter Two literature review that Christian writers on marriage preparation devote considerable space in their course to the issue of marital roles. Mace (1972:62-67) argues that the premarital couple should first identify their individual expectations and goals for their marriage and then to consider altering, adjusting or even dropping these expectations in pursuit of a unified marital relationship. To avoid later misunderstandings in the marriage, Klassen (1983:75) encourages the couple to clarify their work and domestic roles, while Rolfe (1985:167) focuses on the couple's individual expectations with regard to how they conduct their marriage, raise children, spend time with friends and spend their leisure time. Grimer (1986:46-48) requires premarital couples to identify their role expectations within the home and their careers, taking into account the influence of their parents as role models. Giblin (1994:154-155) similarly expects his premarital couples to examine the models that they had learned from their families of origin when discussing their expectations of marriage. Of notable interest had been the narrative approach of Wilson (1991:121-124) in that he encourages the couple to tell and listen to each other's story as they clarify their expectations regarding family, friends, marital roles, sexuality, family planning and communication skills.

In contrast to the positive experiences of the above couples with regard to this session, four couples⁵ cited their long-term relationships as the reason why they did not learn anything new about their respective marital roles and responsibilities (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.2.2).

In concluding the review of this session we need to take note of the four individuals who did express difficulty in recalling the roles and responsibilities exercise. However, this negative response is ameliorated to some extent in that as our interview progressed, three of these individuals were able to recall some aspects of this section of the session. For instance, the male partner of the couple interviewed with the baby girl, although initially vague in recalling the roles and responsibilities exercise, as the conversation developed became quite detailed in his recall (*see* Reflections 3.4.1).

3.4 Reflections

As I look back on the above review of this session, the following two reflections come to mind:

⁵ These four couples were not the same as the three couples who felt they already possessed a full understanding of their family relationships.

- 3.4.1 In the first place, although over half of the interviewed couples (six) had maintained that they had come to a fresh understanding regarding the influence of their relationships with their parents, just less than half (five out of the 11 interviewed couples) had believed that in view of their long-term relationships they were not likely to have learnt anything of value from this discussion (*See Chapter. Five, Recommendation 3.2.2*, where the issue of premarital couples in long-term relations is discussed). Three of this latter grouping did however add that there had been some value in revisiting this issue during the session although not necessarily resulting in fresh insights. Notably, all of the interviewed couples had been confident when they entered this session in their preferred knowledges as to what is true and certain about their family relations and influence. It is my sense from these interviews that none of these couples had been sufficiently challenged during the couple exercise or group discussion to consider their preferred knowledges about their shaping by their family and their culture (Drewery & Winslade 1997:40). This research finding suggests that the focus during the first part of this session should not be the family of origin but rather the dominant discourse that shape the couples lives and their relationships and in this process discover where relevant the family of origin as historical context from which their beliefs operate and the discourses developed. In Chapter Five it is recommended that premarital couples be offered the opportunity to explore their self-making and shaping through the influence of their families, social culture and inherited language (see Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.1.4).
- 3.4.2 It would however be fair to conclude that overall the interviewed couples had believed they had been afforded the opportunity to envisage how they intended relating to one another as husband and wife in the context of their marital roles and responsibilities. In effect, only two couples experienced difficulty during our conversation to relate meaningfully to the roles and responsibilities exercise and discussion and of these two couples, only one person (male) could not recall the roles and responsibilities exercise at all. This positive outcome strongly suggests that even greater emphasis could be placed on providing couples with sufficient opportunity and time to explore issues such as marital roles and responsibilities. The post-modern discourse holds that our identities or “subjectivities” as husband and wife “are not

necessarily of our own making but are the products of social interactions that are themselves practices of power relations” (Drewery & Winslade 1997:39). These subjectivities therefore need to be deconstructed through some vigorous debate (*see* Recommendation 3.1.3) stimulated by the course facilitator (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.1.1).

4. The session: *Communication, conflict and listening*

4.1 Purpose of this session

The purpose of this session is to offer couples the opportunity to consider their present communication styles within their relationship and to suggest some possible strategies that may improve communication, such as certain listening techniques; the importance of honouring expressed feelings; and the resolution of relational conflict.

4.2 The session content

There are some differences between the original and later version of this particular session. It is difficult to recall exactly when the later version had become established in its present form, since the changes were introduced gradually over time, although mostly during 2006. Sometimes these changes arose spontaneously as the session was in progress and at other times they were consciously designed prior to the session. In considering the interviewees’ experiences of this session it is therefore not always easy to determine whether they were influenced by a specific exercise or theoretical input.

In both versions of this session, the session is started with a brief theoretical introduction on communication problems in relationships, followed by asking the couples to assess their relationship communication performance. In the later version of this session both partners are also required to first assess themselves before comparing the answer with one another. They are then asked to identify their individual strengths and areas of development.

In the original version of this session there were two contributions from the course facilitator, firstly, on a suggested model of a so-called *Minimum Involved and Maximum Involved Marriage* (which in the later version had been moved to the *Roles and Responsibilities* session) and, secondly, on the causes of relational conflict. This theoretical contribution is then followed by an exercise

for couples that require the identification of two major factors that escalate conflict and that help to resolve the conflict.

In the later version the above two contributions were omitted in favour of a contribution on the communication model of sender and receiver and the message (and how it is scrambled), followed by how to listen empathically. Couples are then required to practice listening to one another for two minutes, the listener briefly responding with a summary to indicate they have heard both the contents and feelings expressed by the speaker. Next the couples are introduced to Arnold Mol's (1981:48-49) "Knee-cap" communication technique, which is structured so that each partner speaks uninterrupted while the other person only listens. Only when the listener has reflected in their own words what they have heard and the speaker confirms that this is the intended meaning, may the listener become the speaker. If there is time during the session couples would practice this technique, otherwise they are asked to put it into practice at home. It is worth mentioning that Groom (2001:50) refers to a so-called "Speaker-Listener Technique" developed in the United States during the mid-1990s that controls the flow of discussion by means of holding an object and that the listener has to paraphrase what had been heard without rebuttal.

At this point, in this later version of the session, couples are then required to identify factors escalating and alleviating conflict in relationship. In both the original and later versions of the session it is brought to a conclusion with a group discussion around possible conflict resolution strategies. In the later version the Knee-cap Technique is offered as a structured way of talking about difficult issues in the relationship.

4.3 The Couples' experience of the session

Of all the sessions discussed during the 11 couple interviews, this session on "Communication, Listening and Conflict" is best remembered by the interviewees since this is the session from which almost all gained some fresh insights regarding marital communication as well as various listening and conflict resolution techniques that they considered to be helpful.

Ten out of the 11 couples interviewed commented specifically on the part of the session relating to the importance of *effectively listening* when communicating with another person and, without exception, all of them had acknowledged this as having been a key experience for them. At the same time, the individual stories of this session suggest that different meanings were

constructed by the various individuals and couples. For instance, the couple, who had attended the first session of the review period for this study, had acknowledged the wisdom of listening with an open heart during the session, but they admitted that in the heat of the moment they sometimes forgot the ideal. The male partner of another couple told me that in the past he could be dismissive when the other person did not immediately “get it”, but that he had learnt from this session to put himself in his partner’s shoes when listening to her. A couple, who were particularly confident of their relationship, did concede that their participation in this session had helped them to focus on underlying issues when they listen to one another, whereas for another couple the outstanding experience of this session had been that they had really started listening to each other.

Of particular interest to me had been the discovery that of all the couples interviewed who had attended the last five courses of the review period; four alleged that for them the ‘Knee-cap Technique’ had been a turning point in their relationship communication. As far as my memory serves me in this regard, the Knee-cap Technique had been introduced during those last five courses of the review period. The one couple had talked through the night after this session using this communication tool to explore issues about their relationship that they had been unable to discuss before. The Knee-cap exercise had given another individual the opportunity during the session to really hear her partner talking about himself, while the couple, who had attended the last course of the review period, were delighted that they had learnt about this listening technique together. All four couples appreciated the way this Knee-cap Technique structured discussion so that couples are obliged to listen to each other respectfully and with full attention. Interestingly, although these couples remembered the powerful impact that the introduction of the communication tool had made on their minds at the time, and that they had even practiced it then none of them felt that they had needed to use the technique in their marriages up to the time of my interviews with them. They all claimed, however, that if the need for a serious discussion arose that they would use this particular communication tool.

Of particular interest to me in the literature has been the recent article by Joan Groom (2001:50) where she cites the “Speaker-Listener Technique”, which closely resembles the “Knee-cap Technique” in that the flow of speaking and listening is similarly structured, except that the speaker holds an object while speaking and the listener remains silent until the object is passed on to them.

Clarification of what is heard is also an essential requirement for this communication technique.

Christian writers on marriage preparation, according to the literature review in Chapter Five, have included marital communication as an essential part of their courses. For instance, one of the earliest writers on marriage preparation, Michael Foley (1981:33) stated quite explicitly that for him good communication “gets to the very heart of what marriage is all about” and Klassen (1983:76) argued that the quality of marriage is dependent on effective communication and therefore the premarital couple need to be made aware of any faulty communication between them. Good communication, according to the Roman Catholic writers Fr. John Thomas and Fr. David Thomas (1994:91-92), is the life blood of marital relationships and necessitate that there is clarity as to the meaning of words. Giblin (1994:153) similarly emphasizes that seeking clarification is part of good marital communication practice. Premarital couples are required in Paulukonis’ (1995:30-33,38-42,46-48) marriage preparation course to practice the communication skills of attending, reflective listening (labelling feelings and identifying content), responding (empathy, questioning and respect), and presenting (i.e. summarising, sharing self and confronting). Of notable interest is the article by Murray (2006:76) where she reports from her interdenominational survey of clergy active in marriage preparation that *communication skills* and *conflict resolution* ranked with commitment to the marriage, attitudes and beliefs about marriage and spending time with one’s partner as the five most important topics to be addressed.

Four of the 11 couples interviewed commented not only on the importance of listening to the contents of communication but also on *identifying the feelings* being expressed. The couple who had participated in the first course of the review period spoke of allowing each other the opportunity to express their feelings, in particular their experience as new parents to a baby boy. The three remaining couples commented on the fact that the one partner in the relationship had learnt as a consequence of this particular session to take responsibility for their feelings as well as to express them to their partner. Two of these partners were male and the third female. On the other hand, the couple with the baby girl specifically said that they could not remember any theoretical input or discussion on listening for the feelings, and the male partner of the couple who had participated in the first course of the review period, similarly could not recall anything in this regard. However, his wife

remembered the discussion well and the importance of interpreting the feelings behind the words.

Thomas and Thomas (1994:93-95) in particular point to marital communication as respecting one another's feelings and accordingly couples are urged to adopt a non-judgmental and open acceptance of one another in the relationship. Giblin (1994:152) identifies in marital communication the need for self-disclosure in the relationship and the taking of the risk to speak one's mind to one's partner, sharing feelings, even anger. Closely related to the sharing of one's emotional life, Klassen (1983:77) refers to the social research of Miller, Corrales and Wackman (1975) to the effect that "by the way people communicate to each other, they are demonstrating their intention to maintain and build, or to destroy, their own and the other person's esteem" (Klassen's words). According to Groom (2001:51), part of practicing "social support" in marital communication is "communication caring" which includes the validation of the other's feelings.

Six of the 11 interviewed couples were able to identify a *conflict resolution* skill that they had acquired during this session. Two couples commented on the fact that subsequent to this session they could recognise that each partner in the relationship approached conflict differently. With both couples, the one partner needed to resolve the conflict immediately while the other partner required time for themselves before responding. In the case of the one couple, it was the male who needed to immediately resolve the conflict while with another couple it was the female. The first couple recalled as helpful that my wife and I shared how in an argument I need to resolve the conflict before we go to bed whereas when she is tired, my wife prefers to sleep on it. The second couple claimed that they had found the suggested technique of brainstorming the problem at hand to be a good way of objectifying the problem so as to avoid unnecessary stress when trying to resolve the particular conflict. Another couple had similarly tried out this technique, which had been introduced into this session during the last year of the review period. The male partner of yet another couple had welcomed the more creative approach to resolving conflict that they had learnt during this session since in his family of origin conflict has simply been avoided and swept under the carpet. His partner made the suggestion that it would be helpful for couples to consider how their families resolve conflict and how they as a couple have been shaped by this. A different female partner had been able to take away from this session the realisation that she needed to first think about a contentious issue

rather than to rush in while she was still quite emotional about the issue, which had been her more natural inclination in the past. The young man, who it had been noted of in the previous session review to be particularly secure about their marital relationship, expressed confidently that as a couple they did not experience much conflict in their relationship, but that they had learnt to compromise their differences.

As regards communication and conflict resolution, Klassen (1983:76-77) refers to the findings of Knudson, Sommers and Golding (1980) that there is a direct correlation between couples' access to one another's interpersonal perceptions and their ability to resolve conflict. The premarital counsellors Thomas and Thomas (1994:98-100) maintain that constructive conflict resolution requires the avoidance of negative tactics such as the silent treatment. They urge couples to *listen* before responding and to keep a measured, calm tone to their voices, to lower the emotional temperature by postponing the argument if necessary, to stay focused on the issue at hand and to refrain from dragging past issues into the present argument. According to Groom's (2001:53-54) review the greatest predictors of marital conflict are criticism, defensiveness, contempt and listener withdrawal (stonewalling) and she concludes that "the fundamental need for the individuals in the relationship [is] to recognize the role basis values such as courage, honesty, generosity and self restraint play in their interactions".

It had also noted in the literature review of social science research in this field that as the marital relationship deteriorates so positive affirmations are replaced by rudeness, sarcasm, criticism and other negative messages (Baron & Byrne 1994:340) and couples in conflict tend to blame one another and express negative evaluations of one another (Bradbury & Fincham 1992:624). Similarly to the marriage preparation writers, social science research suggests that couples should be empathic towards one another when arguing and to avoid hostile or defensive behaviour (Baron & Byrne 2003:337).

In the face of the overwhelming positive expression of support for this session, it is necessary to hear the voice of the couple who had experienced serious communication difficulties during their first year of marriage. The female partner was quite firm in her view that she had not learnt how to deal with marital conflict during this session and, although her husband said that he had come to the realisation during this session that one needed to give the other person an opportunity to talk, this couple had experienced a serious

breakdown in communication during their first year of marriage. This couple had only been able to resolve their difficulties through marital therapy. Apart from this couple, the couple with the baby girl were not sure how they would resolve serious conflict in their marital relationship and did not feel they had been prepared by this session in this regard. In respect to these couples' difficulties, Groom (2001:50) refers to some longitudinal studies that point to communication problems as "the leading risk factors for future divorce and marital distress".

4.4 Reflections

Several reflections come to mind in the wake of the above review of this session:

4.4.1 In the first place, apart from the couple who had experienced a breakdown of communication in their first year of marriage, *all* the other interviewed couples had gained *some* insight or learned a skill regarding effective communication. It is *the* session that everyone recalls with ease.

4.4.2 Secondly, the aspect of this session that undoubtedly stands out above all others is that relating to *effectively listening* as ten of the couples had experienced this as a key learning. The only criticism made regarding the listening component of this session came from a couple who attended the course at a time when the "listening" component had not received sufficient attention. Although the Knee-cap Technique had been introduced only during the last five courses, it is significant that the couples interviewed from those courses singled out this listening tool as providing them with a safe psychological environment within which they were able to listen respectfully and with full attention to one another. What comes to mind at this point is the post-modernist concept of "participatory consciousness" where attentive, non-judgmental listening is achieved by letting "go of the self and direct complete attention to the other" (Heshusius 1995:112). This is similar to the adoption of a "not-knowing" attitude or curiosity about the other person that characterises narrative therapeutic conversation (Freeman & Combs 1996:45; Morgan 2000:4) (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.4).

4.4.3 Thirdly, a much lower number of couples (four couples) were able to refer to the value of identifying feelings in conversation. I need to acknowledge at this point that due to pressure of time this aspect has

not always received consistent attention on each of the 11 courses held throughout the review period. Since it is difficult to determine which of the courses attention had been given to the topic of identifying feelings when listening, it is not possible to determine apart from these four couples which of the other couples had enjoyed exposure to this topic but could not recall the experience. It is however interesting that for these four couples the idea of expressing feelings in the relationship had made a sufficient impact for them to be putting this into practice in their relationships at the time of our interviews.

I am aware that the *expression* of feelings and emotions in relational communication arises from the humanist, person-centred tradition of Carl Rogers and I recognise in myself through my long-standing involvement with Life Line a predilection for this value. Although I am persuaded by the social constructionist view “that ideas of self, like other constructions, are formed through social interaction within particular contexts” (Freeman & Combs 1996:34), I am also clear in my mind that each of us “knows what hurts, what directions to go, what problems are crucial, what experiences have been deeply buried” (Carl Rogers quoted in Hergenhahn 1980:303). We humans are emotional, sentient beings, moved by such emotions as anger, fear, happiness, love, disgust, sadness to act in a particular way. Social culture and inherited language however also shapes how we express, understand and are acted on by these emotions (Goleman 2004:6-7) (*see* Chap 5, Recommendation 3.5).

- 4.4.4 Fourthly, of the 11 couples interviewed six couples were able to identify a skill or a better understanding of how to resolve differences and conflict in their relationship. Again, I am aware that over the period that changes were introduced into this session, conflict resolution did not always receive consistent attention. The couple who experienced marital conflict during their first year of marriage and the couple with the baby girl who were not sure they knew how to resolve conflict, attended courses towards the latter half of 2005 when this session was being restructured and as a consequence some aspects of marital communication such as conflict resolution were omitted or glossed over at the time. It is notable, however, that the six couples who expressed positive sentiments concerning what they had learnt about conflict resolution had all taken part in courses post November 2005. This is the

period when this session in its present format had become stabilised. It would therefore be reasonable to conclude that this aspect of the session, namely conflict resolution, had been as well received as has the practicing of effective listening skills (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.4).

4.4.5 Lastly, concerning the couple who had experienced serious marital conflict during their first year of marriage; it had been my impression during our interview conversation that unless this couple had received individual attention at the time of the marriage course, it is doubtful that acquiring the skills taught in this session would necessarily have helped them. I return to this problem in Chapter Five when I reflect on the challenge of how to balance working with a group while giving special therapeutic attention to a particular couple if such attention appears to be necessary (*see* Recommendation 3.1.1).

The last two sessions of the Marriage Preparation Course are reviewed in Chapter Four, together with some general comments on the Course as a whole.

Chapter 4

Preparing for Marriage: Love, Spirituality, and the Challenge of the Course

1. Introduction

As noted at the beginning of Chapter Three, my research findings are based on the conversations that I have had with the 11 couples selected from the 11 different marriage preparation courses completed over the review period of this study and are reported in Chapters Three and Four. In this I continue to reflect on what I have learned from my conversations with the participating couples concerning their experience of the Christ Church Constantia Marriage Preparation Course and notably the two remaining sessions, “Love, romance, sex and children” and “Growing together emotionally and spiritually” as well as some general reflections by couples on the course as a whole.

2. The session: *Love, romance, sex and children*

2.1 Purpose of this session

The purpose of this session is to offer couples the opportunity to explore the meaning of love, particularly within the marital relationship. The role of romance, sexual relationship and the impact of children on the marital relationship are also explored.

2.2 The session content

Several changes were introduced over time into this session as will be noted below. The session starts off with a general introduction on the importance of marital intimacy without this becoming a how-to-do session on sexual intercourse. In the original version, a group brainstorm on romance was held followed by general discussion. In the later, revised version of this session, this part has been moved to after the section on love.

In the earlier version of the session, some general comments on the meaning of love in marriage were offered, while in the later version I have been using a reflection on love in the modern age as taken from the writings of David Chapman (2006), who takes the position that one eventually falls out of love. This is then followed in the later version by a further input and exercise based on David Chapman’s “Five Love Languages” (words, gifts, actions, time, and

touch). Directly after this – in the later version of this session – follows a general discussion on romance.

In the original version of the session, the group are asked to brainstorm the question: Where do we learn about sex? This is followed by the group facilitator teaching that sexuality is a gift of God as well as the importance of communicating our sexual needs to one another. In the later version of this session this part has been dropped in favour of focusing on Jack Dominian's (1993:60-61) five features of the meaning of sexual intercourse (which is also covered in the original version) and which for him include the affirmation of each other through the sexual experience; the confirmation of one's own sexuality; at times a means of reconciliation in the relationship; the experience of hope in being recognised through the sexual act; and, a giving thanks for the joy of the relationship. In the later version of this session, couples are given a sheet with questions relating to their sexuality (borrowed from Nicky and Sila Lee's *The Marriage Book*). After each partner has evaluated themselves, couple discussions would follow.

The session then concludes with the impact of children in marriage, focusing particularly on the birth of the first child; and the implications of childlessness for the relationship.

2.3 The Couples' experience of the session

Overall, all 11 couples could relate to this session and only one of these couples could not recall anything of significance about this session, although they clearly recalled the discussion concerning children.

2.3.1 Love

Nine of the 11 couples spoke freely about what they had discovered during this session about *how love is expressed* in the marital relationship. Three couples could relate their greater understanding of love in marriage directly to what Keith had said during this session, although each couple had made a different meaning from their interaction with his teaching. The couple, who had completed the first course of the review period, recalled in particular that Keith had made the point that when as Christians we are married in sickness and health, poverty and prosperity; then we should be prepared for the terrible things that can happen in life. This couple had experienced these words at the time as hard-hitting but nevertheless as expressing the meaning of loving one's partner in a tangible way. Another couple remembered Keith talking about

needing to adapt your love to inevitable change since we all change over time and therefore need to love our partner anew. An important aspect of this insight for this couple was learning to discover and support their partner's needs. A third couple recalled Keith asking what the difference was between living together and being married and for this couple the learning has been the foundation of their sense of security, contentment and sense of arrival that marriage has brought into their lives.

Four of the interviewed couples had attended the marriage preparation courses from November 2005 onward when David Chapman's Five Love Languages had been introduced into this session. The two couples from the last two courses of 2006 referred specifically to the Love Languages which had enabled them to better understand how each partner expressed his or her love for the other. For the one couple the discovery was that the man expressed his love for her through his actions, whereas for the other couple the discovery had been made that the husband particularly needed to be physically assured by her love. Without referring to Chapman's Love Languages, the third couple similarly spoke about how they loved each other in different ways and that it was important to understand these differences. The last couple, both for whom this was a second marriage, acknowledged that their love for one another needed to be cherished and that one of the ways to do this (as discussed during the session) was to make special time for each other, which in the face of the considerable demands of their large family on their time, was essential.

It had been noted in the Chapter Two literature review that considerable research had been undertaken by social scientists into the meaning of love. The ideal form of marital love has been posed by Robert Steinberg in 1986 as *consummate love* where there is an equal balance of *intimacy* (i.e. emotional closeness), *passion* (sexual attraction) and *decision/commitment* (cognitive commitment) present in the relationship (Baron & Byrne 1994:319-320; 2003:325). An earlier study in the 1980s of 351 couples married fifteen years or longer suggested that the success of marriage requires the presence of friendship, commitment, similarity and positive affect (Baron & Byrne 1994:338) and a later study in the mid-1990s came to a similar view when it identified *companionate love* (sharing activities, ideas and humour) as essential to ensuring marital satisfaction (Baron & Byrne 2003:333).

A surprising few of the Christian writers on marriage preparation reviewed in Chapter Two seem to specifically include love and marriage in their courses.

Guldner (1977:254) does identify marital love as expressed in terms of companionship, sharing and affection, while Foley (1981:21) takes a strong theological position when he states that “we have to die to our selfish, single way of life in order to lead a new, shared life based on mutual self-giving”. According to Thomas and Thomas (1994:33-34,38-42), marital love requires dropping our personal defences to reveal our fears, hopes and weaknesses to our loved one while at the same time regarding one’s beloved with respect, give more than one takes and being discerning about, and fully committed to, their real needs, and where there is understanding to move into action for the other.

In contrast to the positive experiences of this session, two couples from the post November 2005 period were not able to recall the Chapman Love Languages exercise or any other aspect to do with love, romance or sex, although the discussion around children had been clearly remembered (see sec. 2.3.3 below).

2.3.2 *Romance*

Five of the 11 couples commented on the value of keeping romance alive in their marriage, but it is interesting that each couple created a different meaning of what romance meant for them. The couple with the baby girl recalled that in their session the women had not singled out the traditional ideas of being romantic such as the giving of flowers and cards on special days but rather had identified romance as being more of an attunement between a couple such as when they exchange a special glance across a crowded room. The female partner of this couple did however also think that it was romantic to make a point of doing something special together.

Three of the female partners revealed during our interview conversations that they particularly appreciated the effort their husbands were making in maintaining romance in their relationships. Interestingly, the men made the point that romantic gestures offered them a tangible opportunity to express their love for their wives while one of these men said that his wife should convey to him her needs in order for him to satisfy them. However, even of greater significance was the fact that of these five couples, none of the men spoke about whether they in turn would like to be romanced by their wives. It is only now in reflection that I realise that there had been this omission in the conversations concerning romance (*see* Chap. 5, sec. 1.3.1).

It is remarkable that none of the reviewed writers on marriage preparation have included romantic love as part of marital love in their courses. However,

it had been noted in the Chapter Five literature review that some of social science quantitative research had sought to explain the presence of romantic attraction by resorting to either a bio-evolutionary, patriarchal discourse that suggests sexual love has to do with the reproduction of the human race (Baron & Byrne 1994:314) or that holds romantic love as an equitable exchange of male success and female attraction (Baron & Byrne 1994:317). The psychological discourse in this regard holds that romantic attraction stems from the matching of the love object to one's project ideal. This is achieved by minimising the loved one's faults and emphasising their virtues (Baron & Byrne 2003:317). The research study by Knee (1998:367) suggests that relationships are strengthened where couples believe that they are destined for each other.

In contrast to the above-mentioned couples, it is noteworthy that none of the remaining six interviewed couples suggested during our interview conversations that they had made any particular discovery during this session regarding keeping romance alive in their relationships.

Finally, it is worth taking note of the observation made by one of the male partners from the five couples in favour of romance, who suggested that perhaps romance requires to be looked at more diligently during this session as many couples are living together, many are in long-term relationships, and that the romance of the relationship therefore tends to become neglected (*see* Chapter Five, Recommendation 3.2.2 where the issue of premarital couples who are in long-term relationship is considered).

2.3.3 *Sexuality*

A rather telling aspect of the conversations with the 11 couples was that only one couple could recall that sexuality had been dealt with in this session. It was this couple's recommendation that if there were not sufficient time or if there were awkwardness in the group concerning the topic that couples should at least be given a questionnaire to take home. In the conversation with the couple with the teenage daughter it became apparent that the husband had been experiencing sexual dysfunction at the time of the marriage preparation course, but that the couple had just put this down to stress. They were of the opinion that it would have been helpful to them if they at least had a questionnaire to consider which was directed at their sexual relationship (as noted above in sec. 2.2 such an exercise had been introduced in the revised Course, although not always consistently put into practice during this session – *See* Reflections below, sec. 2.4.4).

This low response to the sexuality aspect of this session can undoubtedly be ascribed to the fact that the topic had often not been dealt with satisfactorily during the review period. On some occasions hardly any mention had been made of sexuality in marriage, while at other times couples were given a questionnaire that queried their sexual relationship, which they were to discuss as a couple, and often, due to pressure of time, they were asked to do these questionnaires at home (*See Sec. 2.4.4 below*).

The theological position of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) on sexuality is reflected in its Prayer Book where God's gift of sex is seen to find its lasting expression in marriage (ACSA *Prayer Book 1989:458*). However, the Christian writers on marriage preparation reviewed in Chapter Two still tend to reflect the patriarchal discourse of their day that holds men are more physical in their relationships than women (Baron & Byrne 1994:324). At the same time, social science research does point to the increased presence of premarital sexuality in intimate relationships where first-time intercourse had dropped since the 1970s through to the 1990s for boys at 17 years of age and 16 for girls (Baron & Byrne 1994:324; 2003:326). Yet, other studies purport that whereas at least 56 percent of cohabiting couples have sex at least twice a week, amongst married couples *sexual activity* declines within the first four years of marriage from 11 intercourse acts every four week to 7,5 (Baron and Byrne 2003:332).

Against this background it is interesting then to note, for instance, that although David Mace (1972:79) writes about sexuality in marriage from the perspective of the era of Masters and Johnson (1972:74-75), he is insistent that sexuality in marriage is about the experience and not the performance. In posing the sexual union of husband and wife as a total giving and receiving, physically as well as emotionally and spiritually, Jack Dominian (1993:62) envisages marital sexuality as "an expression of prayer" in the sense that true prayer is total self-giving. In Guldner's (1977:255) premarital course the couple explore their attitude, behaviour and communication in the sexual act, while Wood (1979:48) poses a number of questions that explore the couple's early understanding and experience of sex as well as their current attitude towards sexuality in the relationship, taking into account the presence of assertiveness and aggression, affection or lack thereof, openness and modesty. Michael Foley's (1981:45) writing on sexuality reflects the discourse of his day where the wife's sexual satisfaction is dependent on her husband fulfilling his role "as provider, protector and supporter or co-parent" and her energy levels in

terms of her domestic responsibilities. The Roman Catholic position on the prohibitions against premarital sex, contraception and divorce is strongly reflected in the pronouncements of the African Bishops at the Rome Synod of 1981 where marital sexuality is viewed as a gift of God, expressing self-giving and reflecting relational power (Afer 1981:19-20). Klassen (1983:75) adopts a practical approach to counseling premarital couples on the physiology of sex and the sexual act, family planning and contraception. Finally, although Thomas and Thomas (1994:110-111) in their writing on sexuality in marriage reflect the patriarchal discourse of their day in that men tend to be more goal-focused and career-orientated while women are more sensitive as to how the goal is achieved, they pose that “[s]ex is not only something we do; sex is something we are” (1994:108). Sexual fidelity in marriage therefore implies a “freeing up of each person to fully relate sexually, without fear of rejection or betrayal” (1994:111-112).

2.3.4 *Children*

The issue of children and their impact on the marital relationship seemed to have been the one topic of this particular session that had made the greatest impression on the interviewed couples. All 11 couples recalled quite distinctly the discussions around children. The fact that prior to this session most of these interviewed couples had already held certain knowledge as to whether they wanted children or not, did not seem to have precluded them from learning something of value from their participation in both the couple and group discussion. At least seven couples spoke of how they had made use of the time during this session to discuss the various issues raised. The couple with the baby boy could clearly remember Keith warning against falling pregnant as a means of securing the marital relationship, advice which they had taken seriously prior to making the decision to have a child. (At the time of the interview their baby boy was a couple of months old and almost three years had passed since their attendance of the marriage preparation course.)

It is particularly notable that at least three couples pointed out that it had been useful to talk about the various joys and challenges related to parenting, but that only time would tell what they would decide and do when faced with issues such as a seriously disabled child or not to be able to fall pregnant. The couple who were particularly confident about their relationship said that they had decided during the session they would adopt if faced with a fertility issue, although they also admitted that they would have to confront that problem if

and when it arises. Another couple however admitted that at the time of the session this discussion had been particularly difficult for them and during our interview the husband still expressed his ambivalence to what would happen if they had a child born with a serious disability. The couple - the wife had experienced difficulties in adjusting to her role as wife - expressed their gratitude at been given the opportunity during this session to consider this issue as this had prepared them for the difficulty of falling pregnant which they were facing at the time of our interview.

Four couples claimed that they had taken the opportunity during the session to discuss when they wanted to have children, although one of these couples expressed their surprise that on their particular course quite a few of the other couples in their group had not seemed to have discussed the matter prior to coming on the course. Although it has been helpful to discuss these issues during the session, the couple with the baby girl did talk about the distinct difference between considering the issue of children in the marriage as we had done in this session and actually becoming a parent. They had not realised just how different their life style would become until the birth of their baby girl.

Two couples suggested that an opportunity should be given for couples during the session to discuss the pressures placed on newly-wed couples by parents and society as to when they are going to have children and that the issue of children should receive an even greater emphasis in this session. The couple for whom this was a second marriage suggested that in discussing the issue of children in marriage, young couples should be asked how they intend to balance the demands of parenting while trying to sustain their marital relationship. The male partner of the couple with the teenage daughter similarly felt that this session had not taken their unique situation into account when the issue of children in the marriage had been discussed.

It had been noted in the Chapter Two literature review that of the reviewed writers on marriage preparation, only the Roman Catholic writers, Michael Foley and Fathers Thomas and Thomas, wrote extensively on the topic of children and parenthood. When Foley discusses parenthood he has in mind solely the matter of falling pregnant, although he is quite definite that "parenthood is a very important aspect of marriage preparation" (1981:52). However, he is equally firmly placed within the theological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on human sexuality. Even though he suggests that theology and the realities of the modern, industrial society should be "closely

related”, he also advises married couples to adopt the ovulation method as the only natural contraception for Roman Catholic couples (1981: 54.58). Thomas and Thomas similarly counsel premarital couples to adhere to the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching concerning Natural Family Planning (1994:132-136). Interestingly, they counsel couples struggling to have children to express their fruitfulness through service to others (1994:137-140). When it comes to the birth of the first child, they advise couples to establish clear family ground rules and being clear about their respective roles as mother and father while taking care that their own relationship is not neglected (1994:140-142).

2.4 Reflections

2.4.1 In the first place, it would appear from the overview of this session that the course facilitator’s contribution with reference to *love and marriage* had made a key impression on seven out of the 11 couples interviewed. Three couples, who had participated in the original course, could relate their insights regarding love in marriage directly to what Keith had said during this session, whereas four couples from the later version of the course connected their discovery of how they and their partners express love to the presentation of the Five Love Languages model. Although the contributions by Keith and myself were different in content, it would seem that the couples had experienced these contributions as authoritative and as a consequence had been influential in their subsequent meaning-making concerning marital love. However, the post-modernist view is that “one particular way of knowing” does not reflect the richness of “our own, personal, immediate, lived experience” and consequently “no ‘expert knowledge’ can generalize with accuracy about human life” (Payne 2000:25). White similarly (White & Epston 1990:20,53) points to the danger of becoming subjugating by the power-knowledge relations of the expert, in this case the Marriage Preparation Course facilitator, whose language could be experienced by the couples as the embodiment of expert knowledge on a given idea, belief or practice. On the other hand, it is of particular interest to note that these couples had made differently sense of these contributions in terms of their respective relationships and values. If one looks at the three couples who had participated in Keith’s groups, it is noteworthy that each couple had constructed a different meaning for themselves from what Keith had to say about the subject of love. Similarly, each of the couples who had participated in the course during the Five Love

Languages period had each made a different meaning from what had been said and discussed on this particular subject. This research finding does strongly indicate the post-modernist view that “meaning and understanding are socially constructed. We do not arrive at, or have, meaning and understanding until we take communicative action” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). In the light of this perspective, the above research finding suggests that in order for “communication action” to have taken place, both course facilitators (Keith and myself) had to some extent provided “a free conversational space...in which...‘newness’ [for the couples] could occur” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29) and, as a consequence, they were able to construct their own meaning without necessarily submitting to the power-knowledge of the perceived expert. It is suggested in Chapter Five (*see* Recommendation 3.1) that the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia should take place within the context of participatory action research with its emphasis on reflexive and dialectic critique and participant collaboration (Winter 1996:13) as well as that the role of the course facilitator should be essentially one of providing “free conversation space” for each couple to explore the meaning of marriage for themselves.

- 2.4.2 Secondly, it would seem that *all* of the interviewed couples had experienced the part of this session *vis-à-vis children and marriage* as offering them an opportunity to discuss and consider this issue in their marriage. Again, various couples had constructed different meanings out these discussions, some of which were already being realised in their lives at the time of the interviews. To what extent their present circumstances at the time of the interview influenced their recall of the session on the matter of children is not certain, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that all the couples had been able to discuss in the interview whatever aspect of children had interested them at the time of the course. As noted above in section 2.4.1, in facilitating this Course the “personal, immediate, lived experience” (Payne 2000:25) of the couples need to be taken into account. It would therefore seem that the value of this part of the session is to be found in the opportunity (“free conversational space”) that couples were given to respond to challenging questions on issues such as childless marriage, whether it is by choice or necessity (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendations 3.1).

- 2.4.3 Thirdly, it is evident that the subject of *sexuality in marriage* had mostly been avoided in this session, which accounts for the almost total absence of recall by the couples on the matter. In essence, to my mind there are probably four main explanations for the inattentiveness regarding sexuality in this session. Firstly, although the course contents on the topic reflects the contemporary ease of Christian religious discourse on human sexuality as God's gift (as expressed in the *Anglican Prayer Book 1989:458*), the course facilitators need to be self reflexive as to whether they honestly reflect this ease. I am not sure whether I necessarily reflected that ease on the Course during the review period (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.1.2). Secondly, directly flowing on from this point, I also wondered whether the age discrepancy between my wife and I and the young couples could have contributed to the awkwardness on the subject of sexuality in marriage. It is notable that social science research points to the revolution in sexual behaviour since the 1970s through to the 1990s where sexual intercourse has become part of intimate relationships (Baron & Byrne 1994:324; 2003:332,326) while I had been shaped in an earlier period. (I realise now as I reflect on these interview conversations that I had failed to explore this speculative thought with the interviewees - *see* Chap. 5, sec. 1.3.1). Thirdly, part of the problem, I believe, is that some couples are sexually active in their relationship while others are deferring entering into a full sexual relationship until they are married. The scientific, expert knowledge mentioned above point to a relaxing of sexual attitudes but fails to account for those individuals who hold quite contradictory ethical views on intimate sexuality relationships. It is quite difficult to strike a balanced stance when raising issues relating to sexuality bearing in mind this disparity in sexual experiences amongst the couples (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.6). Fourthly, I am aware that - possibly in reaction to what I felt to be an outdated, authoritative presentation on sexuality - as course facilitator I had tended to down play the issue (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.1.2).
- 2.4.4 Finally, it is apparent from this review that the approach adopted with regard to the teaching of some topics such as romantic love and the follow on couple and group exercises do not necessarily meet the needs of *long-term relationship couples* who come for marriage preparation. In pertaining to this session, it is rather telling that six out of the 11

couples could not recall discussing romance and that the one couple suggested that *romance* requires a fresh look for couples since many who come to marriage preparation are in long term relationships. The implication is that couples who are already in long-term relationships may have started to take one another for granted and that the topic of romance offers an opportunity for couples to re-consider how they may keep their relationship fresh and alive in the coming years of their impending marriage. This conclusion then relates back to an earlier conclusion (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 2.4.3), which had stated that the apparent prevalence of couples in long-term relationships should be factored into the design of the marriage course (*see also* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.2.2).

3. The session: *Growing together emotionally and spiritually in marriage*

3.1 Purpose of this session

The purpose of this part of the course is for couples to consider, on the one hand, how they can support one another emotionally and, on the other hand, to reflect on the spiritual meaning and implications for themselves of marrying within the context of a Christian marriage service.

3.2 The session content

In the original version of the course, when there were only five sessions, the last session focused on growing together emotionally as well as spiritually. In the revised version of this session the “Growing Together Emotionally” has become incorporated into the above discussed session, “Love, romance, sexuality and children”⁶.

In both versions of the course, the “Growing Together Emotionally” is opened with a group brainstorm on what is meant by emotions and feelings and then the group is asked to consider whether emotions/feelings can be divided into good and bad, positive and negative groupings. In the earlier version the course facilitator would point out that in marriage one would accommodate all these emotions and feelings. In the later version, the facilitator’s reflection on

⁶ During the interviews, I had questioned the couples on their recall of both emotional support and spiritual growth irrespective of whether the former had been incorporated into the present session of “Love, romance, sex and children”. For ease of reporting on the research findings it made sense to rather group these two together as they had originally been structured in the original course.

feelings “as unsolicited, inner reactions to what is going on around us” (based on Gary Chapman) is offered to the group for their consideration. A short exercise then follows where couples share an experience and the listener reflects back possible feelings/emotions. Both versions of the course conclude with an exercise where each partner reflects on the emotional support they would like from their partner. In the later version this reflection is then shared with the partner and afterwards a brief group discussion follows.

In the later six-sessions course, the first session of the course is titled “Marrying within a Faith Community” in which, after the scene for the course is set, the couples explore the difference of meaning-making in living together and being married, and why they have chosen to marry in a church, in particular our stone-and-slate-roofed Church. At this point the couples are told that marriage preparation at Christ Church is intended as a forum for couples entering into marriage to explore this journey within a faith context and our parish as a community in which couples can build marriages that will flourish with a view to encourage them to make our parish their spiritual home. The sixth session of the later version of the later six-session course is titled “Growing Together Spiritually”, which starts with an exploration by the group of the meaning of spirituality, followed by some reflections on Christian faith in the context of the *kairos* (crisis) events of our lives, including marriage (My story and Our story and God’s story). This is followed by comparing the commitment of marriage to the commitment of faith; and finally, suggesting that couples find a faith home where they will be welcomed, enjoy comfort and be affirmed both as individuals and couple, and also where they will be able to celebrate their lives and marriage in worship.

3.3 The Couples’ experience of the session

3.3.1 Emotional support

Only three out of the 11 couples could speak with some confidence of their experience on the course of discovering the value of supporting one another emotionally in their marriages. The male partner of the couple with the baby girl maintained that it had been his discovery during this part of the course that he had not been as emotionally supportive of his partner as he could have been. His partner did not agree that this had been her experience of him at the time of the course, although both felt that since marriage and fatherhood he was particularly emotionally present in their relationship. The female partner of another couple maintained that it had been particularly difficult for her to

verbalise her feelings. The third couple had found this part of the course particularly meaningful as they were experiencing considerable stress at the time of the course and it had highlighted for them the joy of sharing their lives and being emotionally supportive of one another during times of stress and other personal difficulties.

The remaining eight couples had little or no memory of this part of the course, The couple with the teenage daughter expressed strongly that they had not come away from the course with any better understanding of how to support each other emotionally in their marriage and that this was something they had learnt through marital therapy during the first year of their marriage. None of the other couples could specifically recall any discussions or exercises relating to emotional support within the marriage or understanding one's feelings, although one couple vaguely recalled the emotional support exercise. One of the male partners from this group expressed the view that the issue of emotional support is more a "communication thing" and he suggested that perhaps it should be included under that heading.

With respect to the issue of emotional support in marriage it is of interest that a recent social science study had linked greater intimacy in the marital relationship to when each partner feels understood, the interaction between them is pleasant and positive feelings are expressed and emotions and private information are disclosed (Baron & Byrne 2003:338). Although Foley (1981:25-32) intimates that the sharing of feelings strengthens the marital relationship, he holds the patriarchal position that men are more cognitive and women more feeling and people-centred. He however concedes that this gender difference probably has much to do with socialisation. Emotional closeness for Thomas and David Thomas (1994:93-94) is reflected in the couple respecting each other's feelings and adopting an open acceptance of one another. Self-disclosure in the relationship, according to Giblin (1994:152-153), necessitates taking the risk of speaking one's heart to one's partner, sharing feelings, even one's anger, while Groom (2001:51) encourages the practice of "social support" which amongst other things entails the validation of your partner's feelings.

3.3.2 *Spirituality*

Seven of the 11 couples, conversely, were able to talk easily and openly about what they had learnt about spirituality and marriage on this course. Again, similarly to the varied responses with regard to children and marriage, these seven couples had responded to quite differing aspects of spirituality. Of this

group, three couples related positively to the exposition of Christian spirituality. The couple with the baby boy had taken to heart Keith's suggestion that couples should find a faith community where they would experience spiritual support. At the time of our interview they were members of a nearby Christian Community Church. They felt strongly that a couple's spirituality is what marriage is about and should accordingly be addressed in a Christian marriage preparation course. The couple, where the wife had experienced difficulty in her role as wife during the first year of their marriage, claimed that this course had prepared them, and in particular the man, spiritually for their wedding and marriage. The couple, for whom both this was their second marriage, expressed themselves particularly strongly in favour of the spiritual aspects of the course. As far as this woman was concerned, the spirituality aspect was the sealing wax on the course for her, while for her husband it had brought home the lack in his previous marriage where he and his wife had not shared a common spirituality and faith. The other four couples were honest during our conversations to articulate their ambivalence as to finding it difficult to express their spirituality within formal church structures and ritual, although each couple in their own way were exploring the meaning of spirituality in their lives and marriage. Two couples spoke of experiencing the Divine in nature and valued the time they spent together walking in the wild, while the other two spoke eloquently of the spirituality and meaning of their marital relationship. On the whole these four couples were not condemnatory of the Church, although uncertain as to how formal religion could contain and express their spirituality. Certainly one of these couples was critical of their friends who attended Church but, according to them, lived hypocritical, immoral lives. At the same time this couple were quite resolute that their children should associate with other children within a faith context as this would provide them with a solid environment of values. Another woman expressed her surprise that the course had focused so much on the practical issues such as communication while not being explicitly "more spiritual", although the male of this couple then hastened to praise the practical approach of the course.

It had been possible to discern from the Chapter Two literature review that Christian writers on marriage preparation fall roughly into two groupings as regards spirituality and marriage. The larger cluster of these writers represent the expected time-honoured view, which in the words of Parsons (1967:5), sees the *purpose* of marriage preparation as bringing the couple to "commitment to

faith in Christ, and life in his Church". Wood (1979:48-49) places the devotional life, centred in faith and the Church, as being central to a Christian marriage while the African Bishops at the Rome Synod of 1981 similarly link faith and marriage as expressed in the theology of dying in marriage to the "old" person "in order to be born again as 'new' persons with a new and deeper love" (Afer 1981:21). For Foley (1981:69-75) Christian marriage is a vocation reflecting a life of mutual love, devotion and service to others, thereby witnessing the Christian faith, whereas Rolfe (1983:240) speaks of marriage as "a permanent covenant in which God is involved". Krömker (1994:15-18) adopts a patriarchal position in that for him the faith-based relationship sees the husband as the head of the family with the wife submitting to his authority out of respect for him and for God. On the other hand, Christian marriage becomes a sacramental symbol of God's love and presence in human life for Thomas and Thomas (1994:165-168), based on the life-giving love of Jesus. The spirituality of marriage is then a reflection of a married life lived by means of mutual respect, discipline and sacrifice. Marriage spirituality for Paulukonis (1995:36) finds its expression in the recognition that the sacred (God) is present in our ordinary living and that the married couple's "faithfulness to God" is reflected in "being faithful to each other."

Four of the reviewed writers, although positioned as Christians, are open to a broader interpretation of spirituality. Mitchell and Anderson (1981:85) respect the premarital couple's spirituality by not confronting them regarding their faith position, but rather encourage them to discuss what role religion and faith had played in their families of origin. Klassen (1983:74) engages with couples of diverse faiths, approaching spirituality from their experience of life and death, lifestyle and their attitude toward the future. In exploring the premarital couple's spirituality, Grimer (1986:52-62) introduces three exercises that focus on identifying special moments in their relationship, being of help to one another, and seeking reconciliation in conflict. Finally, if a couple is not particularly religious, Giblin (1994:156-157) introduces the concept of spirituality in terms of their reverence for creation, their sense of the purpose of life, gratefulness and mystery, being part of community, and forgiveness.

In contrast to the above reviewed positive responses to the spirituality aspect of the course, of the remaining four couples two couples were quite adamant that they could not recall anything relating to spirituality and marriage. Interestingly, one of these couples, who were quite confident about their relationship, had completed the course at the beginning of 2005, almost two

years prior to their interview conversation with me, while the second couple had participated in the last course (October 2006) of the review period. The other two couples, who had participated in separate courses in 2005, were so vague in their recollection of this part of the course that it was not possible to hold a meaningful conversation on the topic.

3.4 Reflections

3.4.1 In the first place, from the above overview of the conversations with the couples regarding exploring the meaning of emotional support in marriage it is evident that in its present form this part of the course, irrespective of where it had been placed in the original or the later version, had failed to engage the couples with the experience of emotional support. That eight couples participating in different courses throughout the review period that had failed to engage with the concept of emotional closeness and support in marriage strongly supports this conclusion. A number of possible explanations for this apparent failure to engage with the concept of emotional closeness come to mind. In the first place, it is possible that at least for some of the couples the way the topic had been introduced and presented by the course facilitator could have contributed to their lack of engagement. Secondly, as an extension of the latter point, it is a strong possibility that emotional talk remains a difficult one for couples to engage in and therefore the role of the course facilitator in providing a safe conversation space for the couples to explore this subject becomes all the more critical. Thirdly, couples who are in long-term relationships may be of the opinion that they know what it means to be emotionally supportive of one another and therefore find it unnecessary to engage with this concept (*see* Chap. 5, Recommendation 3.2.2). On reflection, I realise that I had omitted during our interview conversations to explore these questions with the participating couples (*see* Chap. 5, sec. 1.3.1).

3.4.2 Secondly, a few couples (three) had however (*see* sec. 3.3.1) made specific meaning out of their engagement with the concept of emotional support within a close relationship. The question then arises as to why these couples had found it a meaningful exercise to engage with the idea of emotional support and closeness. In Chapter Five I make suggestions as to how to possibly engage couples on this topic (*see*

Recommendations 3.7 as well as Recommendations 3.5 (*expression of feelings*) and 3.2.2 (i.e. *long-term relationships*).

3.4.3 Thirdly, the fact that a good number of the interviewed couples (seven) had engaged significantly with the idea of spirituality and marriage suggests that couples preparing for marriage within a Christian context would be concerned with the faith aspect of their marriage and that one would expect them to engage fully with this part of the course. However, it is evident from the interview conversations that only a minority of the couples interviewed responded in a more traditional fashion to the presentation of the faith aspects of Christian marriage. Apart from the four couples who could not recall anything of significance regarding spirituality and marriage, a further four couples could not readily express their own spirituality in the traditional faith terms of the Church, although as already noted these couple were able to convey a sense of spirituality in their lives. This discovery about how the majority of the interviewed couples related to Christian spirituality is surely not too surprising if it is taken into account that as part of our pastoral care ministry to married couples at Christ Church we accept couples from outside our parish into the marriage preparation course provided they marry in our Church. Their connection to the parish is at times quite tenuous although a family member, parents or even grandparents, is invariable on the parish role. Since not all couples who participate in the Christ Church marriage preparation course are members of our congregation, the possibility is strong that they may also not be practicing Christians in the sense of worshipping regularly at a church. In the light of this conclusion, the question that comes to mind is whether the present marriage preparation course is sufficiently flexible to accommodate both those couples who worship within the traditional Christian context and couples who feel a need to marry within a Church but do not necessarily live their spirituality according to this tradition. On the other hand, it may be argued that if couples wish to marry at Christ Church it is their choice that they are participating in a Christian-based marriage preparation course. However, if one sees this marriage preparation course as an opportunity to dialogue with couples who are seeking to marry within a traditional Christian setting, then surely the engagement with them should be sufficiently open to encourage a meaningful debate. The above review of this aspect of the course

strongly suggests that we have not necessarily achieved this goal. I make a specific recommendation in Chapter Five concerning this matter (*see* Recommendation 3.9).

4. The Course

4.1 Purpose of the Course

The overall purpose of the marriage preparation course at Christ Church is on the one hand to offer couples the opportunity to deliberate on the many practical challenges of marriage and on the other hand for couples to come to a spiritual understanding that in seeking God's blessing on their marriage they are beginning a journey of faith and spirituality that intersects with God's story for humanity as exemplified in the gospels.

4.2 The couples' overall experience of the Course

Ten of the 11 interviewed couples in one way or another had expressed their appreciation for attending the marriage preparation course. It was only the couple with the teenage daughter who had not found the course to have been particularly helpful in preparing them for their difficult first year of marriage. I will return to their response in my conclusion here below. Seven couples purposely expressed the view that they had experienced the course as having been overall helpful and worthwhile in preparing them for their marriages. Five males from these couples had admitted that they had initially not wanted to participate in the course but by its completion they were grateful that they had been obliged to do the course.

On enquiring what specifically had made the Course worthwhile, six couples made the observation that it had been the combination of the couple exercises and sharing within the group context that had made the course real for them. The couple exercises had provided them with a safe space to explore new ideas before speaking out in the larger group, while the latter context had provided them with a learning environment where they could evaluate their own views against the opinions and experiences of other couples embarking on the same journey of marriage.

The value of the teaching, either by Keith or myself, according to five of the couples had been that it had challenged them to consider particular issues as well as helped them to focus their discussions as couples and within the group. One couple had felt challenged by Keith's suggestion that there are several possible persons to whom we could be married and they have come to

understand that a good marriage is built on a continuous commitment to one another even as they undergo change. Another couple had found the personal sharing of my wife and me regarding our marriage to have been encouraging and enlightening.

Interestingly, the one aspect of the course that had stood out for the couple who had experienced serious marital conflict in their first year of marriage was when I challenged the couples to consider the high rate of divorce in this country. Throughout their difficult first year of marriage they knew they did not want to become yet another divorce statistic.

Three couples said that the course had given them specific tools such as the Knee-cap Technique and conflict resolution skills that they could apply in their marriage. Two other couples were grateful for the insights that they had come to during the course regarding such issues as their differences in personality and how to overcome these differences by focusing on the strengths of each individual in the relationship.

4.3 Reflections

4.3.1 On reflection, the value of the Course for the interviewed couples would seem to be rooted in the ways they were afforded to discuss issues concerning marriage that according to their own admission they ordinarily would not have done. These discussions took place firstly within a certain structured context, namely the *course teaching* (see sec. 4.3.2 below), which in some instances had challenged the couples to rethink their own positions. Secondly, the *couple and group discussions* (see sec. 4.3.3 below) had provided couples with the necessary conversational space to explore their personal positions on a number of issues related to marriage.

4.3.2 With regard to the teaching, it had already been noted earlier that in some instances the teaching of the course facilitator did impact significantly on the minds of the participating couples (see above Reflection 2.4.1). If the teaching of the course facilitator were experienced by the participants as normative and authoritative (Kotzé & Kotzé nd:62), then the languaging of the teaching would be privileged as knowledgeable and thereby constituting a particular power-knowledge relation (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:9). However, the observation had also been made that the research finding for that session suggested the possibility that the course facilitators had open up a conversational space for the

couples to reflect and make their own meaning that was particular to their circumstances and that they were not necessarily subjugated to the power-knowledge of the course facilitator. On balance, it would be fair to suggest that the couples had not experienced the teaching as authoritative and normative, although it had also been noted that at least one couple took seriously the course facilitator's suggestion that there is not one special marital partner destined for one. White (2002:14) speaks of therapeutic conversations contributing "to us being other than who we were at the outset of these conversations". If the session conversations are to provide premarital couples with the opportunity to become other than who they were at the outset of the Course, a critical "[a]wareness of contradictions" is required of the course facilitator which "comes from a process of concrete engagement" (Beverly Harrison quoted in Ackermann 1996:43) with the participants. In Chapter Five I caution that the course facilitators as authority figure need to be self-reflexive of their role as authoritative voice by striving at all times to adopt the role of change agent (*see* Recommendation 3.1.2).

- 4.3.3 The value of the group discussions, according to some couples, is that it had availed them of an opportunity to engage with differences of opinions and fresh perspectives relating to issues in intimate and marital relationships. It would seem that the group debate is a powerful change agent process that should be encouraged and may even be more important at times than the Course contents. The caveat to this observation is that the challenge of open debate would be limited to the extent that most of the couples present on this particular course come from similar advantaged social and economic backgrounds and, inevitable, any discussions that takes place would reflect "the range and social power of existing discourses" (Weedon 1987:26) of these mostly middle class couples. In this context it is notable that the prevailing group view on one particular course that women should adopt a caregiving role had marginalized and suppressed the voice of one woman and accordingly had contributed to her experiencing depression and confusion during their first year of marriage as she struggled to establish her identity in the marriage (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 3.3.2, paragraph 4). This would seem to have been a case of her voice being influenced and subjugated (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:10) to the point where she no longer had a sense of her own identity as wife. In Chapter Five I

recommend that the course facilitator challenges discourses that marginalize minority views (*see* Recommendation 3.1.2).

5. The Way Forward

This brings the report of my research findings based on interview conversations with 11 married couples selected from the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia to a conclusion. Apart from summarising my findings of how these couples experienced the Course and placing these experiences within the context of the literature on Christian marriage preparation and premarital counseling, I also reflected on the meaning that I have made concerning my research findings, referring to the post-modernist, narrative discourse where I deemed the context to be appropriate.

These reflections on the experiences of the interviewed couples have provided me with some insights as to how the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia could possibly be adjusted, and even re-designed, in order that it may continue to provide premarital couples with the opportunity to consider the sort of marriage they visualise for themselves. The basic scaffolding for any possible adjustments and re-design of the Course is presented in Chapter Five in the form of Nine Recommendations. In addition to these recommendations, I also reflect on the achievements and failures of my research undertaking. At the same time I also reflect as to whether my personal seashell metaphor has served me well on this research journey.

Chapter 5

Reflections and Recommendations

The starting point of this research study had been the curiosity that I held as pastoral caregiver within the context of my faith community as to the efficacy of the marriage preparation course originally designed and facilitated by the minister of our faith community and subsequently, partly, facilitated by myself and my wife. In particular I was curious as to what impact the *content* of the Marriage Preparation Course has had on those couples who have participated and completed the Course since 2004. I was also curious as to what influence, if any, the *style of facilitating* this Course may have had on the way in which the couples were making meaning of the Course contents. The focus of my research curiosity has throughout been to be alerted to possible ways that the contents and the style of facilitation of the Marriage Preparation Course could be shaped, not only to reflect the tradition of our faith, but also to be relevant to the life-world of the premarital couples entering into a Christian marriage at the beginning of the 21st century.

The subsequent research journey that grew out of this initial curiosity has however alerted me not only to making discoveries concerning strengths and limitations of this marriage preparation course, but also to assist me in coming to a better understanding of both the worth and shortcomings of my research journey. In this chapter I therefore reflect both on the discoveries that I have made with regard to the research journey as well as to what insights I have acquired concerning the marriage preparation course in question and in what way my personal *sea shell* metaphor has guided me on this research journey. I conclude the chapter by making a number of recommendations as to the possible future design of the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia.

1 My research journey

1.1 Overview of my research approach

As a pastoral counsellor working within a post-modern narrative therapeutic framework, I had deliberately adopted a post-modernist stance towards how I would obtain the data required to pursue my research curiosity. This post-modernist position had alerted me not to expect to “discover” some sort of objective generalisable truth about marriage preparation, but rather to understand that the data gathered relating to it would be a reflection of the

meaning that the couples had constructed of their participation in the specific marriage preparation work undertaken within my faith community (Lowe 1991:43-45). It is this meaning-making that stands central to my research methodology. I am persuaded by this post-modernist perspective that the only true meaning that one can make of the Marriage Preparation Course in question is to reflect on the lived experiences of the course by the participating couples (Payne 2000:25). Consequently, I had positioned my research approach within the qualitative mould as I was particularly interested to understand *the meaning* that the couples have *constructed* of their participation in the marriage preparation course (Merriam 1998:6). Therefore my chosen method of data gathering had been to interview 11 couples selected from each of the 11 marriage preparation courses that had been held over the review period of this study. The interviews were semi-structured in that the same questions were put to the different couples. These questions reflected the topics of the marriage preparation course and were intended to explore with the couples the extent that they had acquired knowledge and insights with regards to their marital relationships. Bearing in mind the social constructionist viewpoint that it would be expected that each couple would have constructed their particular reality and individual experience of the marriage of the Course, each interview tended to develop its own unique character.

Furthermore, the data collection process was mediated through my active, responsive participation in the conversations with the couples. The argument that I had subsequently made from these interviews regarding the marriage preparation course is therefore not merely a reflection of what I had learned from my conversations with the participating couples, but rather reflects the meaning that I had constructed together with these couples during the process of the conversations and that I later summarised in my letters to the couples.

1.2 *Achievement of my research approach*

Reflecting back on this chosen research journey, the question upper most in my mind is to what extent has my research approach been successful in obtaining the data essential for the fulfilment of my curiosity relating to the efficacy of the marriage preparation course. Later in this chapter (*see* sec. 3) I make a number of recommendations concerning the Course based on my research findings. In the following section (section 1.3) I consider the shortcomings of my research approach, but here I wish to review the achievements of my research approach.

In the first place, in adopting a qualitative approach to this case study of the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia, I had been able to listen to the unique experiences of 11 married couples who had participated in the Course. In listening and “[h]earing what is not explicitly stated but only implied” (Merriam 1998:23), I had been placed in a unique position to further question the couples concerning their individual experiences of the Course. Some of these questions had been couched as hypothetical, asking the interviewees to speculate as to what could have happened if a particular session had been conducted differently. At other times the questions were more speculative as I checked my understanding of what had been said (Merriam 1998:77-78). As a consequence of these questions, the couples had been able to make known what meaning they had made concerning the Course topics of *the differentiation of self; the art of communication; roles and responsibilities in marriage; love, sexuality and parenting; and faith and spirituality in Christian marriage*. In particular, some of the interviewed couples had made known instances where the Course had not effectively facilitated a learning experience for them such as during the *Conflict resolution* exercise in the *Communication* session and the *Sexuality and Romance discussion* in the corresponding session. At the same time, as a consequence of a particular couple exercise or group discussion, some couples had become “other than who [they] were at the outset” (White 2002:14) of the Course. In particular the Knee-cap Technique in the *Communication* session, the *Roles and Responsibilities* exercise in the corresponding session, and the *Expression of Love* and *Children and Parenthood* discussions in the *Love, Romance, Sex and Children* session come here to mind. I had been able to make these latter discoveries by asking follow up questions throughout the different interviews to explore to what extent the different couples had experienced these exercises and discussions similarly or differently. It was through these questions that I had gained insight as to what it had meant for the participants to be in the particular setting of the Course, what was transpiring for them and what meaning they had constructed from their participation (Merriam 1998:6).

Although I had been able to discover considerable communality in the 11 couples’ experiences of the Course, I had also at times during the interviews heard the marginalized, subjugated voice of individuals and couples, which had alerted me to the need for a more flexible approach to the presentation of the Course. At the time of the sessions in question as course facilitator I had not observed the feelings and how the couples interpreted their experience – it

was only as a consequence of the interview research technique that I was able to make these discoveries (Merriam 1998:72). Bearing in mind that what I observed through my interviews had been the couples' "constructions of reality - how they understood" the Course (Merriam 1998:203), I was alerted, for instance, through these observations to the necessity for the course facilitator to interact in future with individual couples outside the group context. The qualitative research approach of this case study was therefore uniquely appropriate for me to hear and explore these alternative voices that may not necessarily have been detected if a quantitative research approach had been pursued.

This case study had not been a fully participatory research undertaking in the sense that the interview participants had not shared in the conceptualisation and research practice of the case study (although they had been given opportunities to respond to my letters and the research findings in the drafts Chapters Three and Four), nor had they changed as a consequence of participating in this research study (McTaggart 1997:6-7). Nevertheless, the input of the participating couples has been invaluable in considering what possible changes need to be made to the Course. McTaggart (1997:31) speaks of participatory action research being "concerned simultaneously with changing individuals" (the premarital couples) and the culture" (of the Course). Participating action research would be conducted on the understanding that the participants "agree to work together to [possibly] change" (the Course). In the past changes that had been made (as indicated in the course content overviews recorded in Chapters Three and Four) were mostly based on my own intuitive sense that an alternative approach might be more effective. Now however the proposed changes, as indicated in the Recommendations below, reflect not merely my own ideas, but also incorporate the experiences of the actual participants.

A corollary of the previous point is that it is only by means of these individual interview conversations that it had been possible to discover what unique reality each couple (or individual partner) had constructed of the Course. The account of these unique experiences have influenced my own meaning-making concerning the Course and contributed to the shaping of the subsequent recommendations. It is possible that some of the questions that may be asked in a quantitative questionnaire could have anticipated possible variations of experiences, but it is doubtful that such a quantitative research approach

would have uncovered the richness and diversity of the couples' experiences of the Course. Such diversity could only be discovered by creating a free conversation space where the couples' experiences of the Course could be explored. I am satisfied that at least some of the richness of diverse experiences had been uncovered as a consequence of approaching this case study as a qualitative research project. Although it may be possible to generalise some of the research findings of this study to case studies of other marriage preparation courses (Stake 1994:237,241; Merriam 1998:207-208), in the end the value of this qualitative case study lies in its uniqueness as the story of a particular marriage preparation course in a particular faith community setting (Janesick 1994:217).

1.3 *Shortcomings of my research approach*

I now turn to the perceived shortcomings of my research approach and I consider to what extent this has hindered the construction of a meaningful argument pertaining to the possible re-design of the marriage preparation course.

1.3.1 *Questions that were not asked during the interviews*

In reflecting on the 11 conversations with regards to the meaning that each couple had made of the different course sessions, I have identified a number of questions concerning their experiences of the course that were not asked during the interviews. A particularly interesting issue that had surfaced during these conversations was the prevalence of long-term couples on the marriage preparation course and the question that has remained unanswered is to what extent this factor needs to be taken into account in the design of the course (see Chap. 3, sec. 2.4.4; Chap. 4, sec. 2.4.4). I had not explored this question with the majority of the interviewed couples. Another challenging question that I had not asked was to what extent each couple would have wanted to invite a more direct, individual interaction with the course facilitator. For instance, it is not clear whether the inability of couples to come to a meaningful understanding of their respective shaping in the context of their families of origin, points to the failure of the course facilitator to have explored this self-making with each couple (see Chap. 3, sec. 3.4.3). Similarly, I had not asked male partners how they would have liked to be romanced by their wives when the latter had been explicit as to what they considered to be appropriate romantic behaviour (*see* Chap. 4, sec. 2.3.2), nor had I engaged with each of the couples on whether they had experienced awkwardness on

those occasions when the issue of sexuality had been raised (see Chap. 4, sec. 2.4.3). In the same way had I not engaged with couples as to how they understand and experience emotional closeness and support in their relationships (see Chap. 4, sec. 3.4.1 and sec. 3.4.2). This latter question is germane to make meaning as to why so many of the interviewed couples had not engaged with the concept of emotional support in an intimate relationship (see Chap. 4, sec. 3.3.1).

In reflecting back on my research journey I am now able to identify a significant omission in my research methodology namely the ongoing analysis of my field notes and letters after each interview. Merriam (1998:62) recommends that “the right way to analyse data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection” (Merriam’s emphasis) and in so doing the final meaning-making of the research process “is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process”. To some extent I had followed Merriam’s sober advice in this matter as I had picked up on certain issues in the earlier interviews that I wanted to explore more extensively such as *roles and responsibilities in marriage, effective listening, conflict resolution* and *spirituality and marriage*. It is however now evident that I should have been even more vigorous in my pursuit of simultaneous data collection, analysis and subsequent identification of research questions as mentioned above. The research findings of this case study are therefore to some extent compromised since the above-mentioned critical questions must now be considered without the benefit of the interviewed couples’ meaning-making of these questions.

1.3.2 *Failure to engage the interviewed couples more vigorously in conversation*

To my mind an even more serious shortcoming of my research journey has been not to have taken the post-modern perspective, which I had adopted deliberately, to its logical conclusion in the pursuit of this research. In Chapter Three (sec. 3.4.3) I ask the question to what extent the limited interaction between the course facilitator and individual couples prevents the latter from exploring their own self-making. In a very real sense, as both qualitative researcher and narrative counsellor, I had failed to explore in greater detail with each of the interviewed couples as to the shaping of their interpreted meaning of the marriage preparation course. In particular I had not consistently directed my questions specifically to assist the couples uncover

the intersubjective influence of inherited language, family and social culture in their shaping (Hoffman 1990:2). Certainly the conversations that we held during these interviews had not necessarily contributed to the couples being other than who they were at the outset of those conversations (White 2002:14). Admittedly this had not been the prime purpose of this research, but it could have been a significant by-product of the research process. What is however more important in terms of the aims of this research project, is that on reflection I now realise that my research findings could have been so more richer in meaning if I had only paid closer attention to the unique story of each interviewed couple. With the wisdom of hindsight I realise that I could have been clearer in my research aims in order “to be able to judge what to pursue in the interviews” (Mason 2002:68). Nevertheless the richness of conversation was significantly compromised by the limit of time. At the time of considering my methodology I had not specifically given consideration to the length of time to be allotted for the interviews. It is now evident that the hour and a half that emerged as about the time most couples were able to give to the interview was insufficient to explore in any depth the five sessions. It possibly would have been more meaningful to have assigned several one hour interviews rather than the single interview to discuss the couple’s experience of the marriage preparation course. It is however doubtful that most of the couples would have been willing to devote so much of their time to the interviews. An alternative approach could have been to have singled out one or two couples who indicated their particular interest during the first interview as to whether they would be willing to return for a further interview. It would then have been possible to have explored some of the questions raised above in greater detail and richness (*see* sec. 1.2.1 above as well as sec. 1.3.3 below).

In the light of this particular shortcoming, it comes to mind that the ideal would be regular follow up conversations with selected couples after completion of the Course to ensure a continuous process of feedback. Hopefully, by limiting these interviews to perhaps one couple per course it would be possible, from a time perspective, to conduct perhaps a longer interview which would facilitate greater richness of conversation. At the same time the dilemma of people not been able to recall aspects of the Course would be eliminated if these interviews are held within say the first year of their participation in the Course.

1.3.3 *Participatory action research*

In order to ensure sampling relevancy I had elected to interview one couple from each of the 11 courses conducted over the review period. At the same time I had assumed it unlikely that all 11 selected couples would have been willing to become fully participative researchers in this case study. The subsequent process of engaging the selected couples for their one interview confirmed this opinion. Although most of the couples were willing to participate in an interview, it was also apparent that they would not necessarily have been prepared to participate beyond that single commitment. McTaggart (1997:36) points out that participatory action research “is a political process because it involves people making changes together that also will affect others. For this reason, participatory action research *sometimes creates resistance to change, both in the participants themselves and in others*” (emphasis added). Perhaps what I was experiencing with the interview couples when engaging them to participate in this research project, was resistance to change, to remain comfortable within the construct that their participation in the Marriage Preparation Course had been an obligation at the time, and although willing to discuss it with me, there was no necessity to challenge themselves to beyond that expectation. It is however possible that if I had tried to engage them in this research right from the start by pointing out that the interviews were not only intended to elicit from them their experiences of the Course, but also that the interviews were an opportunity for them to explore where they were in their marriage subsequent to completing the Course. Although it had occurred to me at the time to approach them on this basis, I seriously doubt that I would have found sufficient couples willing to commit their time and energy to such a research approach. I now realise that it may have been possible to have engaged at least two or three of the 11 couples (as suggested above, sec. 1.32) to go beyond mere involvement to “authentic participation in research” (McTaggart 1997:28). I am therefore attentive to the loss of richness for this research as a consequence of not collaborating more fully with at least some of the interview couples. In particular that loss is reflected in my not being alerted (beyond my own self-reflexive meaning-making processes) to any “contradictory elements” that I may have dismissed “as irrelevant, because they [did not] fit [my] conceptual framework” (Winter 1996: 22).

2. Reflection on my personal (*sea shell*) metaphor

In the light of the reflection on my personal *sea shell* metaphor (see Chap. 1, sec. 4.1), I ask myself to what extent this metaphor has assisted my meaning-making of my research and whether I have been surprised and delighted as the metaphor suggests.

Certainly a number of my *expectations* as to finding answers to my research curiosity (see Chap. 1, sec. 3.1) had been fulfilled. I had been able to determine, bearing in mind my research shortcomings as acknowledged above (see sec. 1), that on the whole the interviewed couples had found the Course to have been helpful (see Chap.4, sec. 4.2) and in particular that they had made meaning of certain aspects such as the *roles and responsibilities* exercise (see Chap. 3, sec. 3.4.1); the *effective listening* section (see Chap. 3, sec. 4.4.2); the *love and marriage* section (see Chap.4. sec. 2.4.1); and the *children and marriage* section (see Chap. 4, sec. 2.4.2). Also, as I had expected, there were numerous instances where *some* or even a majority of the interviewed couples had *not* been able to make meaning of certain aspects of the Course; for instance, learning more about oneself and one's partner (see Chap. 3, sec. 2.4.2 and 2.4.3); *identifying feelings* (see Chap.3, sec. 4.4.3); *conflict resolution* (see Chap.3, sec. 4.4.4); and the *sexuality in marriage* exercise (see Chap. 4, sec. 2.4.3.).

On the other hand I had been *surprised* that the needs of couples who were already in *long-term relationships* were not necessarily met by the marriage preparation course (see Chap. 3, sec. 2.4.2; Chap. 4, sec. 2.4.4); that such a large number of the interviewed couples had not been able to make meaning out of the emotional closeness section (see Chap. 4. sec. 3.4.2); and that so many couples, who profess to be confident in their living, *do* require a spiritual context for their lives, although they were ambivalent as to whether traditional Christian religious practices would fulfil those spiritual needs (see Chap. 4. sec. 3.4.3).

Looking back on my research journey, I am satisfied that my meaning-making has to a great extent answered my original research curiosity with regard to the marriage preparation course at my church. At the same time, as a pastoral caregiver, I have also engaged with my understanding as to what the Word of God means *concretely* in the context of the praxis of the marriage preparation course at my church (De Gruchy 1994:2,11). My new praxis is especially expressed in Recommendations 1 and 2.

3. Preparing for a Christian Marriage: *Recommendations*

Looking back on the research findings and my reflections of the lived experiences of the interviewed couples as recorded in Chapters Three and Four, a number of recommendations concerning the design of the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia come to mind. The overall purpose of the Course is stated in Chapter Four, section 4.1:

The overall purpose of the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church is on the one hand to offer couples the opportunity to deliberate on the many practical challenges of marriage and on the other hand for couples to come to a spiritual understanding that in seeking God's blessing on their marriage they are beginning a journey of faith and spirituality that intersects with God's story for humanity as exemplified in the gospels.

This purpose speaks of a marital relationship that is open, constructive and dynamic and that as a consequence could be richly rewarding and fulfilling. In order to achieve this stated purpose premarital couples preparing for marriage would need to be challenged to greater awareness of themselves and each other as well as the nature of their relationship.

The recommendations that follow have grown out my research findings as recorded in Chapters Three and Four and are intended as pointers to a course that should remain dynamic and adaptable to the needs of premarital couples preparing for marriage within a spiritual, faith-based context. The recommendations are suggestive of the possible direction in which the Course could be developed and are therefore to be seen as the scaffolding for a re-designed Course rather than as a final blueprint. Though an attempt has been made to order the recommendations in such a way as to reflect a logical design structure for the Course, inevitably several of the recommendations overlap and interact with one another. In the end it has to be said that all of the recommendations need to be read as a whole if the Course is to be re-designed to reflect the style of presentation as suggested in the first recommendation.

The method of presentation as adopted below is that each recommendation statement is followed by explanatory text, which includes reference to narrative and post-modernist literature while linking the rationale for the recommendation back to the research findings in Chapters Three and Four and notably my reflections on those findings.

3.1 Recommendation 1

That in the presentation of the Marriage Preparation Course serious consideration should be given to the adoption of participative action research as a broad model for the Course where the participants would engage with the facilitator to create/find knowledges and practices that will prepare them for marriage.

The implementation of this recommendation is made up of four pre-requisites, namely: (i) the adoption of participative action research as broad model; (ii) the role of the course facilitator; (iii) the implementation of the narrative tools of externalisation and deconstruction when facilitating group discussions, and (iv) encouraging couples to consider their self-making and shaping through the influence of family, culture and inherited language.

3.1.1 *Participative action research*

Although a degree of participative knowledge creation has been observed in the Marriage Preparation Course (*see* Chap. 4, sec. 2.4.2), it is suggested that the deliberate adoption of participative action research as broad model for the Course would encourage the premarital couples not only to participate even more actively in the discussions, but also to become part of the shaping of the Course contents. Participatory action research challenges “the relationships between power and knowledge” by “addressing the need for: *knowledge* – as a resource that affects decisions”; *action* – which looks at who is involved in the production of such knowledge; and *consciousness* – which looks at how the production of knowledge changes the awareness or worldview of those involved” (emphasis added) (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:70,74). In terms of the Marriage Preparation Course this would mean that the knowledge about marriage presented by the course facilitator as resource should be critically considered by the participants by encouraging them to adopt a more self-reflexive awareness “as they work toward the improvement of their own [future marital] practices” (McTaggart 1997:34). Participative action research is amongst other things about “the process of attempting to have new thoughts about familiar experiences, and the relationships between particular experiences and general ideas” (Winter 1996:14). Of particular concern here would be the adoption of at least three principles of action research. In the first place, *reflexive critique*, which can be described as “the process of becoming aware of our own perceptual biases”, would require a dialogue

between the course facilitator and the premarital couples “concerning possible interpretations” of words and statements about marriage that are normally taken to be “external facts” and therefore the only “single interpretation of [the] experience” of marriage (Winter 1996:13,19). Secondly, the adoption of a *dialectic critique* that would entail the course facilitator and participants treating the phenomena of marriage “as a set of relations between elements which are different and in some sense opposed, yet at the same time interdependent” (Winter 1996:21), keeping in mind that these elements (e.g. self-identify, love, parenting) are in themselves privileged social constructs that do not represent some essential reality (Anderson 1997:36). The “dialectical approach suggests we subject observed phenomena to a critique” (Winter 1996:21) which means recognising the social structure of these interdependent yet opposing elements of marriage. The richness of reflexivity and dialectics can however only be exploited through *collaboration* where “everyone’s view [the course participants together with the course facilitator] is taken as contribution to understanding” the phenomena of marriage and no one point of view, least of all that of the course facilitator, will be “taken as the final understanding of what all the other points of view really mean” (Winter 1996:13,24).

The application of participative action research as model for discussion offers the possibility that the course facilitator and premarital couples become engaged in self-reflective, open dialogue about marriage. Writing from a feminist practical theological perspective, Ackermann (1993:27) speaks of the ideal Christian communication as characterised by four pre-requisites: firstly, that it is “non-authoritarian” and therefore takes place “between free subjects on an equal basis”. Secondly, “the unconditional freedom of the participants is presupposed”. Thirdly, “the unconditional acceptance of others as individuals entitled to authentic existence is posited”. Finally, “Christian communication is conducted in a context of love”. If we are able to put into practice this kind of open, loving communication within the Marriage Preparation Course, then surely within the context of this part of our faith community’s pastoral care, the “Christian hope for the actualising of the ‘reign of God’, when love, justice, freedom, peace and wholeness will flourish” (Ackermann 1998:89) is being authentically lived.

3.1.2 *The role of the course facilitator*

That the role of the course facilitator should reflect the participative approach of action research by adopting a not-knowing, curious stance toward the elements of marriage under consideration during this Course.

It is suggested that in the past there has been a tendency for the role of the course facilitator to have been one of adopting a modernist, authoritative “knowing” position towards the subject of marriage. The danger of this position is that even though the course facilitator may profess not to be the expert, the ideas that are being put forward become solutions or answers for the premarital couples who seek out the knowledge of the course facilitator concerning married life (Monk 1997:24-25). It is possible that in the past the couples were subjugated by the power-knowledge of the course facilitator as the perceived expert (White & Epston 1990:20,53; Payne 2000:37-38). One of the striking aspects of these research findings has been that the role of the course facilitator had been crucial to the meaning-making of the couples concerning certain aspects of marriage such as love and marriage.

In contrast to the normative approach to teaching, the narrative way of working suggests that the course facilitator would invite the couples as research participants to take up an investigative, exploratory, archaeological position towards marriage (Monk 1997:25). The stance of the course facilitator then becomes one of needing “to know more about what has been said, rather than convey preconceived opinions and expectations about” the subject of marriage (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29). The attitude of the course facilitator develops into one of interest and genuine curiosity as to the couples’ experiences, ever mindful not to silence the couples with his or her knowledges and abilities concerning marriage (Monk 1997:25-26). This not-knowing position of the course facilitator towards the subject under discussion presupposes “a philosophical stance that ‘maintains that *understanding is always interpretive* ... that there is no privileged standpoint for understanding” (emphasis added) (Wachterhauser quoted in Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28). The role of the course facilitator essentially becomes one of developing a free conversational space in which the unique, lived experiences of the premarital couples can be explored in relation to the topic of marriage (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29; Monk 1997:26). It is suggested that the creation of this free conversational space is only possible if the course facilitator adopts a participatory listening mode where his or her self-other

boundary becomes less discrete and the premarital couples are experienced as unique, individual, separate and distinct. This is a listening attention that can only be achieved by temporarily letting go of the self and directing complete attention to the other (Heshusius 1995:217,218).

In adopting this not-knowing, participatory listening approach to facilitating the Marriage Preparation Course, the teaching no longer would be characterised as protective, paternalistic caring, but rather as a negotiated learning by both the course facilitator and the premarital couples (Kotzé & Kotzé nd:64; Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). The marriage preparation becomes a participatory process where the course facilitator collaborates with the couples in challenging limiting discourses and negotiating ways of being married in an ethical and ecological accountable way” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8). The role of the course facilitator in this collaborative process would be to introduce the dominant discourses that shape marriage for discussion while the premarital couples bring the content to the Course as they consider what these discourses entail and how they function in their personal lives and histories.

Recommendation 10 below considers the role of the course facilitator in relation to the Marriage Preparation Course as a group activity and/or individual couple conversation.

3.1.3 The narrative tools of externalisation and deconstruction

Recommendation 4 below suggests that premarital couples should be made familiar with some of the narrative therapy tools for therapeutic conversations. Part of the process of familiarising them would be for the couples to experience the course facilitator facilitating discussion through externalised conversation and deconstructive questioning. In experiencing these techniques the couples would be prepared for the session on communication to further internalise the narrative approach to conversation.

When facilitating the conversation the course facilitator needs to externalise ideas, values, beliefs in the same way as the narrative therapist would externalise and separate problems from people (Morgan 2000:17) and in doing so help the couples to “identify and separate from unitary knowledges and ‘truth’ discourses that are subjugating them” (White & Epston 1990:30). Since these ideas, values and beliefs are constructed “norms around which person are incited to shape or constitute their lives” (White & Epston 1990:19-20), it is

necessary to further deconstruct these norms (i.e. ideas, values and beliefs) by means of deconstructive listening and questioning.

Deconstructive listening is guided by the belief that our life stories have “many possible meanings” and “we seek to capitalize on this by looking for gaps in our understanding” (Freeman & Combs 1996:47) by asking one another to fill in the details and resolve the ambiguities. The purpose of deconstructive questioning is to map and identify the influence of the idea, value or belief in the life and relationship of the other person and then to invite the person to map and identify their influence and the influence of their relationships in the “life” of the idea, value or belief (White & Epston 1990:42-45). Through this process of deconstructive questioning, particularly related to the influence of the person on the life of the idea, value of belief, the person is able to uncover those unique moments when they had resisted their subjugation to the particular idea, value or belief, challenging the reality of the particular dominant truth (White & Epston 1990:31).

It is proposed that in applying the process of externalisation and deconstructive questioning the course facilitator is facilitating an experience that will enable the couples to explore their shaping and subjugating to the influence of family, society and inherited language.

3.1.4 That the premarital couples be encouraged through the facilitation efforts of the course facilitator to explore their self-making and shaping through the influence of their families, social culture and inherited language.

As has already been noted in Chapter One (*see* sec. 4.1) the post-modern social constructionist perspective highlights that our shaping as human beings takes place through the intersubjective influence of the family, social culture and inherited language. Unlike the modernist worldview that maintains there is a real world “out there”, ready to be discovered, the social constructionist perspective holds that it “is in language that societies construct their views of reality” (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). What we experience as true, real, and meaningful is a reality that is constructed, modified and maintained through social interaction (Hoffman 1990:2-3). These socially constructed realities become unexamined universal truths through a process that is referred to as *reification* in that we forget our own authorship of our social world (Freedman & Combs 1996:25). The post-structuralist approach of narrative therapy questions these unexamined socially and culturally influenced beliefs, which

White calls “thin” descriptions of life, in order to uncover the actual and complex and lived experiences of each individual (“thick” descriptions) (the so-called unique outcomes referred to in the previous section, 3.1.2) (Payne 2000:33).

However, “to argue that one is constituted through discourse does not deny agency and subjectivity; it is merely to insist upon the cultural context of action and identity” (Graham 1996:109). I am therefore suggesting that in preparing for marriage, which for the Christian couple is a state of being distinctly different from when they were part of their families of origin⁷, the ideal would be for the course facilitator to co-create with each participating couple a self-reflexive space where they are able to explore their current meaning-making within the context of family and society and *to become other than who they were at the outset* (White 2002:14) of their participation in the marriage preparation course. In assisting the couple to *re-position* themselves in terms of their individual story by telling their “not-yet-said” stories, the course facilitator would be assisting them to speak with their own voice (Monk 1997:42-43; Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29) and in this new understanding of themselves not to become subjugated to the dominant familial or cultural stories that may have shaped them (White & Epston 1990:14-15).

This implied transformation process could be understood as a rite of passage that consists of a “separation phase”, a “liminal” phase, and a “re-incorporation” phase. In terms of preparing for marriage, the couple separates from the known and familiar (for example, their families of origin) and then enter the liminal phase (the marriage preparation course) that should be characterised by heightened expectations and even confusion and disorientation. The reincorporation phase will hopefully bring a fresh perspective, understanding and appreciation of what marriage means for the couple (White 2002:15-16). It has also been argued that marriage preparation should be seen as a pilgrimage where one has left the place one had been (home), to be transformed along the way (the preparation) and to arrive at the threshold of where one hopes to be (the marriage) (Holmes 2004:102). Idealistically Holmes (2004:105) sees the purpose of marriage preparation as transforming “fiancés into spouses”. To see marriage preparation in terms of a pilgrimage or rite of passage is a powerful metaphor, but I would caution against taking on the burden of such an idealised vision. Rather, I am

⁷ “In order to become ‘one flesh’, each must die to self and together they must be raised a new creation as a married couple” (Marriage in Christ, n.d:1).

persuaded by the spirituality of the feminist philosopher and theologian Luce Irigaray who argues that our aspirations towards full humanity should be understood as an ongoing process (Graham 1999:204); preparing for marriage needs to be seen as only the start of a life-time journey of becoming.

The above stated post-modernist perspective provides the context within which couples would be able to explore their self-making, but this exploration requires the process to be facilitated. In this regard the role of the course facilitator would be critical (*see* Recommendation 3.1.1 above) together with providing the couples with sufficient therapeutic space that will challenge their held beliefs, values and perceptions in a different light (*see* Recommendation 3).

In conclusion, both the theoretical contributions and the couple and group exercises should of necessity encourage couples to undertake this journey of self-examination and exploration. It would seem that some of the exercises of the current Course go some way to providing this stimulus for self reflection and self-examination (for instance, the *Relational Values* exercise, Chap. 3, sec. 2.2; or the *Roles and Responsibilities* exercise, Chap. 3, sec. 3.2). The *Family Tree* exercise and the *Influence of Family* exercise (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 2.4.2), which have been presented in two separate sessions, offer a particular unique opportunity for couples to explore their shaping through influence of family and culture. It is strongly suggested that these two exercises come together in the same session.

3.2 Recommendation 2

That the premarital couples should be encouraged to explore, acknowledge and celebrate what they know of each other.

This recommendation is considered in terms of two headings:

3.2.1 Exploring untapped knowledge of one another

The previous emphasis of the introductory session *Knowing yourself; knowing your partner* has been on identifying both the differences and similarities between the partners, notably in terms of their personalities (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 2.4.1). Some recent social psychological, quantitative research suggests that the quality of close and marital relationships can be linked to personality. For instance, research studies indicate that so-called “secure” individuals are more extraverted and agreeable in relationships than “insecure” and “avoidant individuals” (Shaver & Brennan 1992:543). At the same time it is not always

easy to point to what personality characteristic contributes positively or negatively to the nature of the relationship. For instance, relational conflict could be explained as the consequence of both individuals being negatively minded, or that one of the individuals overreacts to implied criticism, or that in response to withdrawal (e.g. the silent treatment), the other individual experiences relational dissatisfaction (Robins, Caspi & Moffitt 2000:257). In the light of this scientific as well as popular discourse concerning personality and the quality of relationships, I admittedly had during this session increasingly come to emphasize that couples should recognise the extent that their personality differences may influence relational conflict.

An alternative approach that could be adopted in this first session is suggested by a recent quantitative study that purports couples hold untapped knowledge as to what they contribute towards marital satisfaction (Hicks et al 2004:98). The researchers explained this knowledge in terms of Gottman's *Sound Marital House* where a satisfying marital relationship is based on friendship (fondness admiration and turning towards one another), "positive sentiment override" (affirmative affection), conflict resolution through problem solving, being supportive of one another's dreams, and the sharing of meaning. (Hicks et al 2004:100,103). The value of this study is to be found not so much in the suggested affective model as the fact *that premarital couples hold invaluable knowledges of their relational strengths* (Hicks et al, 2004:110).

It is suggested that in this session personality models should not be the focus - the focus should rather be how personality is attended to as less prescriptive and more facilitative as to their own knowledges of themselves. It is therefore further proposed that couples should be encouraged to identify what knowledge they hold of one another's personality and how this knowledge could contribute to the building of a rich and dynamic marital relationship. The focus of this approach would be to encourage an attitude of *curiosity* amongst the couples as to the richness of their relationship as a source for a dynamic and healthy marital relationship. The role of the course facilitator becomes one of encouraging this curiosity through appropriate questioning in order to open up a space (Monk 1997:26) for the couples where they could be able to discover their relationship differences, similarities and experience these as potential strengths in their relationship.

3.2.2 *Long-term relationships*

It had been noted earlier in Chapter Three (*see* sec. 3.4.3) that some couples in *long-term relationships* had not made any significant discoveries with regard to their families of origin, possibly because they believed they already held all relevant knowledge in this regard. Furthermore, it had been suggested by one of the interviewees that the lack of engagement with the topic of romance by so many of these long-term couples may be attributed to their taking one another for granted. In fact one of the interviewees suggested that since many couples are living together, many in long-term relationships, the topic of romance in marriage could be essential as part of the Course (*see* Chap.4, sec. 2.3.2, third paragraph, and sec. 2.4.4). The above-mentioned suggestion of placing emphasis on the knowledges that couples hold of one another (*see* sec. 3.2.1) may hopefully go some way to stimulate these couples in long-term relationships to explore their relationship as a rich resource that holds the potential of nourishing that relationship.

I suggest that the narrative practice of *re-authoring* could be a useful model for when the course facilitator holds individual conversations with couples (*see* Recommendation 10 below), particularly those in long-term relationships. Couples in long-term relationships as well as couples in relationship of shorter duration inevitably over time become shaped by the story-line of their relationship (Carey & Russell 2003:60). In the words of Anderson and Goolishian (quoted in Hart 1995:184):

We live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self descriptions.

Often we tend to be self-deceived in the construction of our stories, which would privilege the viewpoint of the storyteller (Doan 1998:383) concerning their relationship. The narrative concept of re-authoring suggests however that *alternative storylines of identity* can be established as no single story determines our truth. After all, “[w]e are multi-storied” (Carey & Russell 2003:60). The role of the course facilitator would then be to undertake with the couple an inquiry into the current dominant story of their relationship and through a process of exploratory questions to link events and actions to a new sense of identity which would be richer, larger than the present dominant view of their relationship (Carey & Russell 2003:61-63).

3.3 Recommendation 3

That couples are provided with sufficient time and opportunity to consider and discuss amongst themselves as well as within the larger group the teaching and challenging questions offered by the course facilitator.

To a significant extent the present Course does provide couples with a structured context that enables them to discuss and reflect on a range of topics that they ordinarily would not do, often within the context of hearing alternative perspectives and views arising from the group discussions. For instance, it has been noted in Chapters Three and Four that the *roles and responsibilities* gender exercise and follow-on group discussion had challenged couples to re-consider their views and even adjust their position on these matters. It had also been noted that there is the danger that this debate would be limited by socially constructed concepts such as husband and wife becoming typified “as possessing a reality of their own” (Berger & Luckmann 1966 quoted in Freeman & Combs 1996:25) (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 as well as sec. 3.3.2). It is however believed that if Recommendations 1 and 2 were implemented that couples would be enabled to explore through these group discussions their respective ideas, beliefs or values with regard to a particular presented topic. It is however critical that sufficient time is allocated for these exploratory conversations to take place.

3.4 Recommendation 4

That when conveying communication skills in the session “Communication, listening and conflict”, couples are introduced to some post-modernist, narrative communication concepts such as holding a genuine “curiosity”, “participatory consciousness” and “not-knowing listening”, “externalisation” and “deconstruction”.

As noted in my review of the couples’ experience of the session “Communication, Conflict and Listening” (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 4.3), it has been suggested by pastoral researchers that “couple’s interactional processes” (*sic*) and “communication problems” are high predictors of marital distress (Groom 2001:49-50) and that “communication skills” and “conflict resolution” are conceived by premarital pastorals counsellors as very important topics to be addressed in a marriage preparation course (Murray 2006:76). According to various quantitative research studies by social psychologists conflict in marital relationship would seem to be inevitable. For instance, a community-based

survey by McGonagle, Kessler and Schilling (1992:519) had over 90 percent of respondents reporting marital disagreements occurring at least once a month and more. The research of Baxter (1990:85-87) suggests that conflict arises from the desire for independence and the need for closeness in intimate relationship. Conflict and marital dissatisfaction is reported to arise around work and the family, particularly where both partners work (Baron & Byrne 2003:334) and where the wife is the high earner. It is suggested that her absence from home due to long working hours decreases the quality of affection and family life for the husband (Harrell 1990:214). The onset of parenthood is another reported potential source of conflict, which is characterised by a decline in emotional and sexual intimacy (Hackel & Ruble 1992:953), although a much earlier study had reported high rating of fulfilment and satisfaction with the birth of the first born (Feldman & Nash 1984:67). However, this study did also point out that young parents experienced difficulties related to the demands of looking after the baby (Feldman & Nash 1984:68).

It is suggested that in adopting a participative approach in the Course, which would be characterised by the practices of curiosity, not-knowing listening, externalisation and deconstructive questioning, that the couples would experience and hopefully develop over the duration of the whole Course, irrespective of the contents of the sessions, these communication skills. Keeping in mind that these practices should be modelled by the course facilitator throughout all the sessions, it is proposed that during the Communication session the concepts of genuine curiosity and not-knowing listening be introduced.

By curiosity is meant the practice of reflexively observing “what is taking place in greater breadth and depth” (Monk 1997:26) in the conversation or discussion. Invariably this curiosity would give rise to “questions that highlight new possibilities or directions for [one] to consider” (Monk 1997:26). This curiosity becomes possible once the idea of blurring the *self-other* separation is grasped. Irrespective whether one holds the humanist view of the “self” as the “existential core of the person” (Mearns & Thorne 2000:57) or leans towards the social constructionist view of “a self” “as a process or *activity* that occurs in the space between people” (emphasis added) (Freeman & Combs 1996:34), this kind of curiosity requires a “not-knowing”, non-judgmental stance that is not limited in perception and understanding through prior experience and knowledge of the other person (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28). Participatory

consciousness requires a curiosity that lets go of the self and directs complete attention on the other when listening to them (Heshusius 1995:112). If this shift of focus in listening is taken on board, then the couples are more likely to be open to understand and internalise externalisation and deconstructive questioning.

Conflict resolution forms part of the communication skills presented in this session and it is strongly suggested that this be retained. Where the interviewed couples had been exposed to the section on conflict resolution, they commended the skills they had acquired and on the face of it had implemented these skills in their marriages (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 4.4.4). To learn to disagree in an agreeable way and to resolve conflict without hostility and defensiveness (Baron & Byrne 2003:337) is a topic that premarital couples should welcome in a marriage preparation course.

When resolving relational conflict, Mol (1981:76)⁸ suggests placing the problem apart from the couple, what he calls a “we versus it” strategy. This approach is similar to the process of externalisation, separating the problem from the person. Morgan (2000:18) suggests that this separation process is helped by giving the problem a name and treating it as a “thing” that is sitting elsewhere in the room. The problem is then identified and understood through the process of deconstructing (taking apart) the ideas, beliefs and practices that assist and constitute its reality (Freeman & Combs 1996:120). As noted above (*see* Recommendation 3.1.2), this deconstruction process is undertaken by the asking of questions and more questions about what is taken for granted as true about the problem as well as what is unknown (Morgan 2000:45).

3.5 Recommendation 5

That the section the “Expression of feelings in intimate relationship” should be retained in the session “Communication, listening and conflict” and that it should not be sacrificed due to pressure of time.

It had been noted in the Chapter Three review of the Communication session that those couples who *did* experience exposure to the idea of expressing feelings in an intimate relationship, were positive in their implementation of this value in their marital relationship (*see* sec. 4.4.3). The well-known North-American marriage counsellor Gary Chapman (2006:44) defines feelings as “our unsolicited, inner, personal reactions to what goes on around us”. We are

⁸ In the last couple of courses, Arnold Mol’s approach to Conflict Resolution had been used.

speaking here of the emotions and feelings of love and tenderness, anger and hate, fear and anxiety, disgust and nausea, sadness and sorrow, and all the myriad of feelings that we experience in our daily lives as we respond to life situations, events, etc. (Goleman 2004:6-7). Emotional maturity for Chapman (2006:49) involves identifying the emotion I am experiencing at the moment; enquiry what had brought it on; why do I feel *this* way; and, what do I intend to do about this emotion or feeling. Since feelings are such an integral part of our human experience, the sharing of such experiences is part of the marital journey of “becoming one flesh”, of communicating our shared thoughts, feelings, activities, dreams, frustrations, joys and sorrows (Chapman 2006:20).

The post-modernist idea that as individuals we give meaning to our lives and relationships by storying our experience and, in interacting with others, we are active in the shaping of our own lives and relationship, may give rise to the notion that merely by unravelling and unpacking these stories will we be able to understand the other person (White & Epston 1990:12-14). In narrative therapy the attitude is one of separating the individual’s identity with a problem by means of externalising that problem or dominant story as existing outside the person (Morgan 2000:17-18; White & Epston 1990:16). I believe that in terms of sharing our emotional lives as a couple, we need to recognise that although our identities are undoubtedly shaped by the influence of our families, society and inherited language, we are also emotional beings and that much of our experiences are expressed in terms of these emotions and feelings. Perhaps the family therapist Johnella Bird’s (2002) usage of “relational externalising” allows for couples to share, explore and understand the significance of emotions more readily. Bird (2002:7) encourages placing “*the self in relationship*” to whatever has been named as significant or meaningful” (Bird’s emphasis) in order to create linguistic space. This approach is predicated on the realisation that we are shaped through inherited language and Bird endeavours to free us from the subjugation of discourse. Consequently, if one explores a feeling of shame, then that experience of shame can be looked at objectively in relations to that person’s life right now, in relationship with others and in relationship with cultural ideas and practices (Bird 2002:8). In conversation the listener still honours and respects the feelings or emotions of their partner but the possibility is created of journeying together to come to understand the significance of that particular emotional experience in the shaping of the partner.

The discussion of expressing feelings, which arises in the Communication session, obviously is closely related to the development of an emotionally supportive and close relationship. This recommendation should then also be read in conjunction with Recommendation 3.7 below.

3.6 Recommendation 6

That the section “Sexuality and Marriage” be retained in the session “Love, romance, sex and children” and that it should be presented in such a manner that all participating couples will feel able to engage with this topic, whether they are sexually active or not in their relationship, and that they would be challenged to consider their socially constructed ideas, values and beliefs concerning human sexuality.

As had been noted in Chapter Four, the subject of *sexuality in marriage* had for a number of reasons (see sec. 2.4.3) mostly been avoided during the session on *Love, romance, sexuality and children*. Yet, sexuality and sexual behaviour is an essential part of intimate human relationships as had been reported by Alfred Kinsey’s (Simpson & Gangestad 1991:870) research in-depth study during the late 1940s. The literature review on sexuality in Chapter Two further attests to the importance of retaining this topic in a marriage preparation course (see Chap. 2, sec. 4.6.2). The Anglican Church is quite explicit in its theology that the sexual “union of husband and wife ... is given that they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love” (*Anglican Prayer Book 1989:461*).

In presenting the topic and endeavouring to encourage discussion, the course facilitator is faced with the possibility that the reluctance of the participants may reflect the privacy of sexuality in their relationship. A corollary to this position is the cultural taboo or discourse of not speaking openly about sexual relationships even though we are daily exposed to sexual behaviour through the media. At the same time, the course facilitator may also experience their own personal discomfort at addressing the topic of sexuality in the group.

Bearing in mind these difficulties related to grappling with sexuality on this Course (see also Chap. 4, sec. 2.4.3), I make the tentative suggestion that when introducing the subject of sexuality a possible starting point would be to encourage an externalised group discussion around the ideas and beliefs around sexuality in modern day life, including gender discourse on the roles of men and women in society and relationships, and if the group seems to be

comfortable with the discussion, to then steer the conversation in the direction of also considering the influence and effects of these beliefs and values on the couples' relationships.

However, it is more than likely, in spite of these practices, that at least some if not all of the couples would continue to experience these discussions as particularly intrusive. It is therefore a further recommendation that sexuality should be one of the topics for discussion between the course facilitator and individual couples as it may not be suitable for group discussion. At least within the individual couple setting it would be easier for the course facilitator to adjust the discussion around sexuality according to how open the couple may feel able to talk about this private issue.

3.7 Recommendation 7

That the section "Emotional Support" should be retained in the Marriage Preparation Course and that sufficient time and space is given for couples to explore and engage meaningfully with this aspect on the marital relationship.

It had been noted in the literature review that Robert Sternberg (1986) holds the view that in a "consummate" marital relationship all three elements of intimacy, passion and decision/commitment need to be present. Intimacy indicates the *closeness* of the partners; passion the sexual excitement and motives associated with the relationship, and decision/commitment involves the cognitive elements of deciding you love the other person and determining to remain committed to them. Similarly, according to the research study of Lippert and Prager (2001) (Baron & Byrne 2003:338) of cohabiting couples, relational satisfaction was greatest when intimacy was experienced such as when disclosing their emotions. This emotional closeness, according to the *Anglican Prayer Book* (1989:461), is God's purpose for husband and wife in that they "give themselves to each other in love, [so that] they shall *grow together and be united in that love*, as Christ is united with his Church" (emphasis added).

In the light of the importance of emotional support and closeness in marriage - the fact that in its present form, irrespective of where it had been placed in the original or the later version of the Course - it had failed to engage the interest of the majority of couples (*see* Chap. 4, sec. 3.3.1), should be a matter of concern. However it has also been noted in the reflection on the issue of emotional closeness (*see* Chap. 4, sec. 3.4.1) that emotional talk may be a

difficult one for couples to engage in. Clearly the role of the course facilitator is germane in creating a safe conversation space to explore the subject more critically. Again, this may be an area that may be easier to discuss within individual couple sessions, but it is suggested that a general discussion concerning emotional closeness and intimacy is possible, in particular when deconstructing the discourse of what constitutes an emotionally satisfying marital relationship.

3.8 Recommendation 8

That the “curriculum” of the Marriage Preparation Course should be sufficiently flexible to be able to accommodate the “local” needs of the participating couples.

Bearing in mind the co-creation approach suggested in Recommendation 3.1 above in that the course facilitator and the couples work together in a participative manner on the various topics introduced in the Course, it is also recommended that the course facilitator should be able to include or exclude exercises and adjust the focus and even contents of a session in response to the needs of the group in relation to the various topics under consideration. For instance, it had been noted in Chapter Four (*see* sec. 2.4.3) that the *sexual relations evaluation* exercise had been dropped because of its focus on sexually active couple whereas sometimes the group included couples who were *not* sexually active prior to their wedding⁹. It is possible that the group could be split in to sexually active and sexually inactive sub-groups with the co-facilitator leading the one group and the course facilitator the other. This would enable the topic to be discussed according to the needs of the participants. On the other hand, it may become apparent that the topic is too private to be discussed in the group and this may be one of the issues that could be discussed in the single couple session(s) with the course facilitator (*see* Recommendation 10 below). Alternatively, a certain group may exhibit a particular high interest in a certain topic such as children and parenthood and that more time would therefore need to be allocated to this topic, possibly at the cost of spending less time on other topics in this session. Care obviously needs to be taken to strike a balance between covering the topics of the curriculum and going with the direction of the participants on a particular topic while ensuring the overall relevance of the Course.

⁹ This information would have been gleaned from the Background questionnaire that I had recently introduced into the Course.

3.9 Recommendation 9

That with the introduction of the spirituality of marriage into the Course, it should be kept in mind that a significant number of couples do not of necessity share the traditional faith practices of our faith community. It is recommended that couples should be challenged to engage creatively with the concept of spirituality without necessarily imposing a narrow, restrictive Christian discourse.

If one regards this marriage preparation course as an opportunity to open up a spiritual dialogue with couples who are seeking to marry within a traditional Christian setting (see Chapter Four, sec. 3.2), then surely the engagement with them should be sufficiently open to encourage a meaningful debate. In my reflection in Chapter Four on my research findings on this aspect, I suggested that we have not necessarily achieved this goal (see Chap. 4, sec. 3.4.3).

At Christ Church Constantia we welcome couples to the marriage preparation course who are not necessarily members of our faith community although it is a requirement that they should be baptised into a recognised Christian Church. If it is our intention to use the marriage preparation course as an evangelical platform, then my research findings intimate that the majority of these couples have not subsequent to being married converted to conventional Christian religious practices (see Chap.4, sec, 3.4.3). Post-modern theology however challenges the 21st century Christian amongst other things to come to “an understanding of the nature, meaning and value of life ... [that] fosters a spirituality of wholeness” where the stories of our lives can be related “to the bigger story presented by the Bible” (Roussouw 1993:899). It is my opinion that we are trying to do this in the marriage preparation course since we do not impose a restrictive denominational perspective on the Course. On the other hand, the post-modern Christian is challenged “to deal with the perspective that religious convictions have more to do with geography than with belief – that the different world religions are nothing but different cultural responses to the *same divine reality*” (emphasis added) (Roussouw 1993:905). I ask myself whether we are prepared to go that far. As a *Christian* pastoral carer I work within a Christian framework and in terms of preparing couples for marriage I am in agreement with my faith community’s requirement that these couples should at least be baptised into the faith. But, are we, in presenting this Course, open to a perspective that suggests that other spiritualities are responding to the same divine reality? I am persuaded that our engagement

with these couples should be from the position of the feminist theological stance that we are called through the proclamation of “the Kingdom of God is at hand”, like Jesus, “to a radical activity of love, to a *way of being in the world* that deepens relation, embodies and extends community, *passes on the gift of life*” (emphasis added to text) (Beverly Wildung Harrison quoted in Ackermann 1996:47).

As course facilitators it is surely our way of being in the world that would speak of our Christian faith to these couples rather than through kerygmatic proclamation. I am further persuaded by Ackermann's (1998:89) position that the Christian hope for the actualisation of God's reign means “engaging with life in such a way that deeds express that which one hopes for”. It is therefore my contention that the engagement with these couples, who come to be married in a Christian context, offers us the opportunity as Christians to “enter the dialogue, with our specific claims and faith experience, but at the same time ready to risk all in a true confrontation with the otherness of the Other” (David Tracy quoted in Petersen 1994: 226). (*See also* below my reflection on Recommendation 3.1).

3.10 Recommendation 10

That the Marriage Preparation Course, which presently is structured as a group experience, should also include individual session(s) for each premarital couple with the course facilitator.

In the light of the research findings that the participants' responses to the various topics discussed were often quite diverse and that what was helpful for some couples was not helpful for other, poses the challenge to create a course that would be open to this diversity. Although it had been suggested above (Recommendation 8) that the contents of the Course could be adjusted according to the needs of the group, this would not cater for individual couples (as well as individual persons) who may have needs that are quite diverse from those of the general group. For instance, it had been noted that the couple who subsequent to the Marriage Preparation Course had experienced marital conflict during the first year of their marriage, in all probability had required a far more direct interaction with the course facilitator who could have challenged some of their relational assumptions, values and perceptions during a private session(s) (*see* Chap. 3, sec. 4.4.5).

One of the big challenges for the Course design would then be to structure it in such a way that the course facilitator would be able to interact with each

couple on some of their more critical issues. Separate, individual sessions would probably have to be held outside the group sessions as it would be difficult to balance group work together with individual meetings between the course facilitators and couples. It is suggested that couples be warned beforehand that apart from the six-session group course, it would be expected that they spent one or two individual sessions with the course facilitator.

3.11 Recommendation 11

That further research could be undertaken as to what diverse needs premarital couples may be bringing to the Marriage Preparation Course at Christ Church Constantia.

At present the Marriage Preparation Course is essentially directed at first-time, younger premarital couples. However, out of the sample of 11 couples interviewed, at least two couples did not fit this profile. Both partners of the one couple had previously been married, the one divorced and the other widowed. In the case of the other mature couple, the man was marrying a woman with a teenage daughter. It is questionable whether the exercise of families of origin would have been applicable for these two couples. It would probably have been more meaningful for them to have explored in what way they had been influenced by their previous marriages. Apart from these mature couples, a number of the younger couples, although entering first-time marriages, had already been living together for a considerable time. To what extent were they already shaped by their long-term relationship and how would this possibly impact on their future marriage? Then there are couples where the one partner had been living away from home for a long time and was quite independent from his or her family of origin, whereas the partner may still be quite close to his or her family. Again, it is questioned whether the present families of origin exercise would be relevant to their situation.

It is however conjectured that irrespective of what the findings of such further research may reveal about the diverse needs of couples being prepared for a Christian marriage at Christ Church Constantia, the only practical way to accommodate such diversity would be to develop a more flexible format for the Course that would include both group and individual couple sessions. This particular approach would be able to accommodate both the value of participatory action research within the group setting as well as the protection of the couple's privacy when discussing sensitive, personal issues through individual sessions.

Conclusion

It is my hope that in the implementation of these suggested recommendations that as future couples are preparing for their marriage, they may come to a richer understanding of the spiritual meaning of their marital relationship, in whatever way they define their spirituality at that point in their lives. What is however important is that we try to ensure at Christ Church Constantia that the Marriage Preparation Course continues to develop as it remains open to the experiences of the premarital couples who participate in this Course. This requires of us a reflexive humility at all times as we engage with these couples through the Course.

In coming to the end of this research journey, I acknowledge that there are no real endings, and I can think of no more fitting words with which to conclude than these well-known lines from the *Four Quartets* by T.S. Eliot (1963:222):

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

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Appendix A:
The Marriage Preparation Course
at Christ Church Constantia

1. Development of the Course

Prior to Keith's appointment seven years ago as rector at Christ Church there had been no marriage preparation courses at our parish church, but with the commencement of his ministry it became a requirement that no couple could be married at our church unless they undergo the marriage preparation course. Initially Keith and his wife, Gladys, had run these marriage preparation groups during the first few years of his ministry at Christ Church.

During the winter months of 2004 Keith invited couples in our parish who had been married for five years or more to participate in a marriage enrichment course. My wife and I joined a group of some ten couples married for a varying length of time and, together with Keith and Gladys, we completed the video-based seven-session course as laid out in *The Marriage Course*¹⁰ by Nicky¹¹ and Sila Lee.

Subsequent to the completion of this course, an informal Marriage Ministry Team was established in the parish and my wife and I elected to *focus on marriage preparation* while some of the other couples from the Marriage Team took responsibility for organising additional marriage enrichment courses based on the above-mentioned course we had just completed.

For the spring and summer months of 2004 and 2005 Keith continued to lead the marriage preparation course groups while my wife and I acted mainly in a supportive role, sharing of our marital experiences when it seemed appropriate. During this period three groups were prepared by Keith (August/September and November/December 2004 and February/March 2005). Then when Keith went on his five-month sabbatical leave in the winter of 2005, he handed over marriage preparation to me and my wife and during his absence we ran three marriage preparation courses (July/August, September/October, and November 2005).

¹⁰ The course focuses on the "marriage wheel" which represents marital commitment as the outer rim, God the hub and the spokes that holds the hub and rim together consists of *Building strong foundations* (taking stock; making time; and nurturing one another, and knowing one another), *Art of Communication*, *Resolving Conflict*, *Power of Forgiveness*, *Parents and Parents-in-Law*, *Good Sex*, and *Love in Action*.

¹¹ Nicky is a pastor within the Anglican Church, UK. Nicky and his wife, Lee, are well-known within Anglican circles for their marriage courses.

On his return from sabbatical leave, Keith and I discussed the future of the marriage preparation courses and his need to be freed from direct involvement with the course and yet remain in contact with the marriage preparation couples. We came to an agreement that my wife and I would focus on the more psychological aspects of the marriage preparation course (Sessions Two to Five), while Keith would take responsibility for placing marriage within the context of Christian faith (Session One) and spirituality (Session Six). This has then been the pattern of presentation and facilitation of the marriage preparation course up to the time of writing this dissertation.

2 Context of the Course

As mention in Chapter One, the marriage preparation course that Keith had originally developed and offered at previous parishes as well as Christ Church is broadly based on guidelines drawn up by Margaret Stevens (1986) for the Catholic parish of St Leonard, Wollaton, Nottingham (UK). This course is also similar to the approach of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa to marriage as presented in its *Prayer Book 1989*, where it is stated unequivocally in the preface to *The Christian Marriage Service* that “the three purposes of marriage are unchangeable” (ACSA Prayer Book 1989, 458) (*emphasis added*):

Marriage is given that the couple may *know each other* in mutual love and find in each other the lifelong companionship and support which is God’s intention for them.

In marriage God’s *gifts of sex and affection* find their true and lasting expression in an indissoluble relationship.

In the security of this relationship, *children* are born and brought up in love and fear of God, being entrusted by him as a sacred charge to their parents.

Apart from the above-mentioned course of St Leonard, Keith had also been influenced in particular by the writings of David Mace (1972), Michael Foley (1981) and Jack Dominian¹² (1993) in the presentation of his marriage preparation course.

3. Course contents

The original course had consisted of *five* one-and-half hour weekly sessions covering the following topics:

¹² Jack Dominian, Roman Catholic and psychiatrist, has written a number of works on marriage in general and not on marriage preparation in specific. *The Everyday God* (1993), which was co-authored with Edmund Flood, also does not purport to be a book on marriage preparation, but it is his views on human sexuality that have been incorporated into the Christ Church marriage preparation course.

1. *Knowing yourself, knowing your partner*
2. *Roles and expectations in marriage*
3. *Communication, conflict and listening*
4. *Sex, love, romance, and children*
5. *Growing together emotionally and spiritually*

As from the beginning of 2006 an additional session was added to the course and some content changes were also introduced:

1. *Marrying within a faith community*
2. *Knowing yourself, knowing your partner*
3. *Communication, conflict and listening*
4. *Roles and expectations in marriage*
5. *Growing together emotionally: love, romance, sex and children*
6. *Growing together spiritually*

In effect the first session, *Marrying within a faith community* and the last session, *Growing together spiritually* are merely an expansion of the original fifth session.

It was probably inevitable that as my wife and I gained in confidence conducting the marriage preparation groups that I would introduce some changes to the contents of the marriage preparation course (Sessions Two to Five). Although I had retained the overall structure and contents of the original course, some of the theoretical input has been adapted and several alternative couple exercises as well as group discussions have been introduced. At the same time it should be stressed that the current course contents does not in essence differ from the original course as designed by our pastor. Perhaps the only significant difference between the current course and the original course is that greater emphasis is placed on certain aspects of relationships such as introducing personality types into the session *Knowing yourself; knowing your partner* and some communication tools in *Communication, conflict and listening*.

A more detailed description of each Session is given in Chapters Three and Four, where any differences between the original course and the later version (2006) are also indicated.

Appendix B:

Interview Guide

Introductory

The purpose of this Interview Guide is to identify some “core” questions that will be sent to the couples beforehand to consider prior to the interview as well as additional questions that may be used during the interview if it is deemed necessary.

The core questions revolve around the six marriage preparation sessions and are intended to act as a stimulant to a conversation concerning the experiences of the couples with regard to the marriage preparation course.

A brief explanation would have been made of the intent of the research during the telephonic contact and invitation to participate

1. The Session: *Knowing yourself, knowing your partner*

Core question:

1. During the session *Knowing yourself, knowing your partner*, had either or both of you been alerted to or made more aware of new knowledges about each other, individual *differences* and *strengths* in your relationship, and how has this knowledge in any way been of assistance in your marriage?

(Possible) Additional questions:

- 1.1 If either or both of you had been alerted to any differences in *personality*, in what way has this knowledge/insight impacted positively or negatively on your ***marital relationship***, if at all?
- 1.2 If either or both of you had been alerted to differences in *habits*, in what way did this knowledge/insight impact positively or negatively on your marital relationship, if at all?
- 1.3 If either or both of you had been alerted to differences in *values*, in what way did this knowledge impact positively or negatively on your marital relationship, if at all?
- 1.4 If you had gained new insight into your partner's *strength(s), ability, gifts* within the relationship, how had this knowledge/insight subsequently been of benefit to your relationship as a married couple, if in any way?

2. The Session: *Roles and expectations in marriage*

Core questions:

- 1 During the session *Roles and expectations in marriage*, had either of you been alerted to or made more aware of the nature of your (emotional/psychological) relationship with your family of origin?
- 2 During this same session were you alerted to or made more aware of your expectations concerning the *roles and responsibilities* of a husband and wife within a marriage? How has this affected your marriage?

(Possible) Additional questions:

- 2.1 During the session *Roles and expectations in marriage* had either of you been alerted to or made more aware of the nature of the relationship with your family of origin; for instance a particular closeness or distance?

- 2.2 If you *had* become alerted on the course to a dependency (emotional/psychological) relationship with your family of origin, how had this been of benefit to your subsequent relationship as a married couple, if at all?
- 2.3 If you were alerted in any way to the possible roles and responsibilities of husband and wife within marriage, how had this subsequently impacted on your roles and responsibilities in your marriage?

3. The Session: *Communication, conflict and listening*

Core questions:

- 1 During the Session *Communication, conflict and listening*, had either or both of you been alerted to or made more aware of *communication styles, preferences or issues* in your relationship and what had you identified those issues to be?
- 2 During the same Session had either or both of you been alerted to or made more aware of how to **resolve conflict** creatively and what had you specifically learnt?

(Possible) Additional questions:

- 3.1 During the Session *Communication, conflict and listening*, had either or both of you been alerted to or made more aware of how to *listen* effectively to one another and what had you specifically learnt?
- 3.2 If you were alerted to the importance of communication in the relationship, how has this knowledge been of assistance in your marital relationship?
- 3.3 How has the marriage preparation course influenced you to resolve conflict? Were you affirmed in your ways of resolving conflict and/or did you learn something new about resolving conflict?
- 3.4 In this same Session the value of listening to and acknowledging your partner's feelings was highlighted. How has this knowledge been of value in your relationship, if indeed it has?

4. The Session: *Romance, love, sex and children*

Core questions:

- 1 During the Session *Romance, love, sex and children*, had you been alerted to or made more aware of your attitude/preferences/needs concerning *love, romance, sex and children* in marriage?

(Possible) Additional question:

- 4.1 If you were in any way alerted during the Session *Romance, love, sex and children*, to the importance of *love, romance, sex and children* in the marital relationship, how has this impacted:
 - (i) In the way you express your *love* for one another;
 - (ii) Retained *romance* in the relationship;
 - (iii) Enjoy a mutually satisfying *sexual relationship*; and,
 - (iv) Maintain a balance between parenting and the marital relationship?

5. The Session: *Growing together emotionally and spiritually*

Core questions:

1. During the Session *Growing together emotionally and spiritually*, had either of you been alerted to or made more aware of growing together and supporting each other *emotionally*?
2. During the same Session had either you gained a new understanding of *spirituality* in marriage and what was that understanding?

(Possible) Additional question

3. If you were in any way alerted to the importance of growing together emotionally and spiritually in the marital relationship, has this understanding impacted on your marriage and your faith?

6. *Structure of the course*

Core question

1. Thinking back on the course, what aspect of the *course structure* (e.g. theoretic input, mentor couples sharing of their experience, couple exercises and group discussions) had helped you in particular to gain some insight/ understanding about marital life?

EXAMPLES of Structural aspects:

(i) Theoretical input: In the Session *Roles and expectations in marriage* the theoretical input concerning *leaving* the family of origin in terms of establishing one's own identity as an independent adult even while one continues to honour one's parents.[verb absent]

(ii) The facilitator (and mentor couple if present) sharing from their experience: In the Session *Romance, love, sex and children* my wife and I shared how we taught our daughter to bake scones on Sunday mornings to give us some intimate marital time without our children being present.

(iii) The couple exercises: In the Session *Communication, conflict, listening* the exercise *Healthy communication* couples were required to assess whether they communicated effectively as a couple.

(iv) The group discussions: For example, in the Session *Romance, love, sex and children*, the group would brainstorm and discuss romance in an intimate relationship and how to maintain romance in a marriage.

(Possible) Additional question:

- 6.1 Considering the role of the theoretical input, the sharing of the facilitator's personal experience, the couple exercises and group discussions during the course, which of these aspects of the course would you have preferred there to have been more or less of? Why?

7. *General*

Is there is any other topic regarding the marriage preparation course that would like to discuss, to be changed, added etc.?

Appendix C:

Interview Letters¹³

Dear Luisa and Dominic

9th March 2007

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me this past Thursday evening, 8th March in your charming home concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course and which you had completed during **August/September 2004** followed by your wedding on the 9th October 2004 at Christ Church, Constantia. This was the first group that my wife, Mary Ann and I had participated with Keith leading it.

Dominic, before we started the interview you wanted to place on record the fact that the first pre-marital interview with Keith stands out for you and Luisa. At this interview Keith had challenged you as to why you were getting married and he had hoped it was not because you were in love. This has made an extraordinary impact on your mind and made you thoughtful about what it involved to be married.

We started with me explaining the purpose of this interview and then asking whether either of you had been alerted during that first session, ***Knowing yourself; knowing my partner*** as to possible significant differences in personality. Luisa you recalled the exercise where you were required to compare with one another how you described yourself and your partner. The exercise had affirmed once again for you Luisa the particular qualities you admired in Dom, namely his social skills and his kind-heartedness. You mused, Dominic that you recall realising in that exercise that Luisa was the planner and you were not. You added, Luisa that you already knew that Dom was the man for you as he reflected the qualities you valued and that you knew you both shared common interests and were compatible in many ways.

You both expressed your appreciation for doing the course. You said Dominic that that first session and all the subsequent sessions had opened up a forum where you as a couple were free to consider what ordinarily you would not have talked about. You added that during the time before the wedding one tends not to think about what will happen after you are married and the course offered the opportunity to consider the implications of being married. Luisa, you said you looked forward to these sessions and that you had taken Keith's advice and went to dinner afterwards where you had discussed at length the topics covered during the particular session. You had told your friends that these sessions had opened up the opportunity to think about your marital relationship.

The session ***Roles and expectations in marriage*** had stood out for both of you as this afforded you the opportunity to discover that you both share the same approach to managing your marriage. You recall Luisa that you discussed this at length during your dinner after the session and that you looked to your friends who exhibited behaviour towards one another you did not want to repeat in your marriage. Dominic you recall Keith saying that the marital partners should respect one another and never bad-mouth each other in public and always be respectful to one another even in argument. You both mentioned that Keith had said one should not use knowledge about your partner in a heated argument that would hurt them.

In talking about respective roles in the marriage, Luisa you said that Dominic hadn't seen himself as the sole breadwinner and you the pregnant wife at home; that you both had gone into the relationship with the understanding that each of your careers were of equal importance. You said that this topic came up several times in discussions

¹³ The Interview letters have been arranged chronologically according to when the interviewees had completed their marriage preparation course and not according to the date of the interview. The first Interview letter therefore reflects the earliest marriage preparation course that is covered by this dissertation.

between you including how you'd handle the demands of parenthood. You said, Dominic that this session had made the business of marriage real for you; that you were able to visualise your role as husband and future father.

You both also recall when Keith spoke about 'leaving' home, not only financially and physically but also emotionally. You commented, Dominic that you both were privileged to come from married and supportive parents. Both of you had lived independently from your families prior to meeting and eventually becoming engaged. You said Luisa that you were both ready to leave your families.

As far as the session **Communication, conflict and listening** is concerned, you said Dominic that at the time you had acknowledged the wisdom of listening with an open heart to your partner. After all, you both are in the communication business, you pointed out Luisa. You said that you recall discussing the topic and in your experience Dominic was a good listener. Of course, you added, life does take over and you added with a laugh Dominic that in the heat of the moment one sometimes forgets the ideal. However, you said, Luisa that you both do communicate about issues as they arise.

You don't recall the aspect of listening for feelings, Dominic, whereas you said Luisa that you remember well this discussion and the importance of interpreting the feelings behind the words and that this is all part of effective communication.

You felt Dominic that having a new-born baby was perhaps the real test for effective communication. This is when your patience is tried and you recall this being highlighted during the course. You said Luisa that you had discussed with Dom the feelings that you have experienced since Daniel's birth and that you both had discussed how the baby could possibly impact on your lives and the need to be open about how you are experiencing the pressure of parenthood.

As to the session **Love, romance, sex and children**, you recalled Luisa that we had talked about the different types of love – erotic, friendship/companionship and that it was the latter that would ensure your marriage stood a chance. It was the issue of children and their impact on the marital relationship that stands out for you both from this session. You observed that initially when you were getting to know Dom you had been 'sold' on him because of his strong feelings about being a father and parent and you had seen how he behaved with other people's children.

You recalled Dominic that the issue of work versus the marriage was discussed during this session and that one had to be aware that the former didn't push the marriage into the background. For you, Luisa, it was Keith saying that one should not have a baby to secure the relationship and that you need to be steadfast in your marriage before considering having children. You also remember that Keith spoke of being married in sickness and healthy, poverty and prosperity and that one had to be prepared for the terrible things that can happen in life. At the time you'd found this viewpoint as hard-hitting but you were glad of the opportunity to reflect on the importance of these things.

Neither of you recall much concerning **Growing emotionally and spiritually in marriage** but for you Luisa this is what marriage is about in any event, part of what you'd expect. You do recall when Keith spoke about find a faith community where you would be supported in a time of crisis and need and you mentioned that you both are members of the Tokai Christian Community church. You also recall Keith saying that you should renew your vows at your friends' weddings and we discussed the value of being reminded of what these vows stood for by saying them out aloud.

Finally, you said in conclusion, Dominic that you questioned calling this course *pre-marital counselling* as this gave the wrong idea and I explained that this was what the North-Americans called it but that the English writers speak of *marriage preparation* and you said that was closer to what it had meant to you. You also said that it had been a comprehensive course and that it had been particularly helpful.

Thank you, Luisa and Dominic for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship. My only regret is that I did not meet your new baby, Daniel.

With the warmest regards, Matthew

Dear Ryan and Jonty
2006

8th November

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed last evening by me concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course which you had completed during **November / December 2004**.

You both expressed your pleasure at being married and Ryan said that he highly recommended it to your unmarried friends. Jonty, you mentioned that people at work were surprised that you are married and you commented that many couples either just live together or marry much later in life.

I asked whether it had been helpful to receive the questions beforehand. You firmed, Jonty that it had been helpful to jog your memories whereas you said, Ryan, you needed to be reminded additionally by Jonty.

Jonty, you said of the first session, *Knowing Yourself; Knowing Your Partner* that since the two of you had been living together you already knew a lot about each other. On the other hand, you, Ryan, said of the first session that you had experienced it as fun, that it was a nice session to start the course. You recalled that after the session the two of you had continued discussing the issues raised during the session. You said that this session had stimulated the two of you to ask new questions concerning the background of your families and how this had impacted on each of you.

Jonty, you mentioned however that an important moment during your engagement had been Ryan's mother's unhappiness that her daughter was not asked to be a bridesmaid at your wedding. You had wanted to confront Ryan's mother over the issue but Ryan had urged you not to do so. This was when the two of you had realised how different you both handled conflict. You mentioned, Jonty, that your father is aggressive and loud in argument whereas Ryan's parents tend to avoid conflict and rather sweep issues under the carpet. You both had become aware that you brought your respective backgrounds into your relationship and over time you have learned to each adapt. Ryan has learnt to raise a concern whereas before he would have remained quiet, while Jonty tries to be calmer in arguments.

Concerning the second session, *Roles and Expectations in Marriage*, Ryan, you said that you both were pretty clear about your roles and responsibilities in the relationship since you'd live together. On the other hand, Jonty, you thought that the challenges are still to come, particularly when there are children and how this conflicted with your careers and other personal interests. You, Ryan, wondered what would happen to financial responsibility when Jonty becomes the mother. You both want to continue in your careers but you also want to have children and that you want to give your children your full attention. You both thought that perhaps a follow-up marriage course during this phase of you marriage would be helpful. Jonty, you said that at present you are caught up in the excitement of being married and that one mustn't confuse that excitement with the responsibilities of marriage. For instance, when you wanted to get

a dog recently Ryan pointed out the responsibilities that pets would bring and the same applies when you decide to have children.

In considering the session, *Communication, conflict and listening*, we talked about the importance of listening to one another in the relationship. You said, Jonty that you felt you needed to listen more in the relationship and to become more aware of Ryan's needs. Ryan is naturally a good listener. You mentioned, Ryan that rather than become upset by the other you try to get into their shoes, to understand why they are acting in a particular way before responding yourself. We had already covered your handling of conflict above.

With regards to the session, *Romance, love, sex and children* you both said that you have learnt the importance of supporting one another's needs. You mentioned, Jonty that for instance Ryan loves going to the movies and that you will sometimes suggest going to see a film which you know Ryan wants to see. On the other hand, you, Ryan, will go to shows with Jonty even though it is not always your thing and that in the end you usually enjoy it. You both acknowledged that loving involves giving to one another freely.

You recalled, Ryan, Keith's speaking about loving your partner *now* and that as we change we learn to love them anew; that our loving has to adapt to the inevitable change that takes place in our partner over time. You agreed, Jonty that change is inevitable and that one needs to bear this in mind when loving one's partner.

Ryan, you said of this session that it had been an eye-opener as to what would happen to your marriage if one of your children had a serious disability. You were not sure that you could handle it while Jonty's feeling is that if this happens then this is what you must face and learn to deal with it. Ryan, you said that you want children, that "we are put on earth to have children", and you therefore said that you were not sure what you would do if you couldn't have children. Jonty, you felt although it was useful to be confronted by these issues during the session, time will tell as to what you should do when such an eventuality did happen. Then would the time to seek out a counsellor to consider your situation.

Jonty, you said of the session *Growing together emotionally and spiritually* that you were "lacking in this department" and that both of you are searching as to what you both believe. In fact you were both now talking about what you believed. You recalled that you both had done the Alpha course prior to the marriage preparation course and that because of the former course you had decided you wanted Keith to marry the two of you. The Alpha course did open your eyes although, Ryan, you said that you both were scared off at the end of the Alpha course, that you felt you were not part of what was presented. At the same time you recalled Keith's question during this particular session as to why you wanted to get married in Church. For you, Ryan, it rang as true to have your marriage witnessed in Church, whereas you, Jonty, found God present in nature and would have liked to have had your wedding outside rather than in a building. You added, Jonty that you were quite certain about your faith; you just have not found a way to express it.

As to **the structure of the course**, you expressed the view, Jonty that being able to discuss questions raised during the sessions, first as a couple and then sharing some views within the group was enjoyable and that it was helpful to hear other couple's experiences and views.

Jonty, you asked why marriage preparation wasn't held further away from the wedding date as this would give the couple the time to reflect on their relationship and if necessary postpone the wedding until they felt ready to commit to marriage. I explained that this has been a logistics problem but that we are now managing to prepare couples at least two or three months prior to their wedding.

In response to my question as to whether you had anything else to add, Ryan, you said that marriage preparation gave you tools for your marital relationship, while you, Jonty,

suggested that perhaps some different exercises need to be given to couples who are already living together and those who have chosen not to do so. You suggested, Ryan, that if it was feasible perhaps one could arrange such an exercise in one of the sessions. Jonty, you said that in your opinion the understanding of matters like decision-making would be different for couples that have lived together prior to marriage and couples who live apart before they wed.

We closed the interview with you both telling me that your relationship was based on implicit mutual trust and that although you spent time together you also pursued your own individual interests and that you believed it was necessary for the health of your marital relationship to maintain your individuality even as you seek a common bond in your marriage.

I thank you, Jonty and Ryan, for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for being so open with me. I wish you well and joy in your future marital relationship.

Warm regards

Matthew

Dear Dianne and Gary
March 2006

Friday, 30th

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me this past Thursday evening concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course which you had completed during **February/March 2005**, followed by your wedding on the 14th May 2005 at Christ Church, Constantia.

We started off with me explaining the purpose of this interview and then I went on to ask what you remembered of the session ***Knowing yourself; knowing your partner***. Although you could not recall the session in detail, Gary, you said that you did remember that this session merely affirmed what you knew of each other and that you both were aware of the differences between you. You added, Dianne that there had been no nasty surprise during this session. In response to my question as to whether you recall the session's focus on bringing out difference in values, habits or particular strengths with regard to the relationship, you responded Gary that you had to be honest and say you didn't recall this part of the session. You added, at this point of the conversation, Gary that you'd initially been apprehensive at doing the marriage preparation course, wondering whether you needed something like this, but that you'd found the entire course helpful and that it afforded you and Dianne the opportunity to talk about the issues raised during the marriage preparation course.

As regards the session ***Roles and responsibilities in Marriage***, you recalled Dianne that you had felt how lucky you were in that both your families are accepting of the two of you. You added, Gary that the session gave you the opportunity to realise how lucky the two of you were in comparison with some other couples (the stories that Keith told) or some of the sharing of the couples in the group. You said further that both your parents were supportive and not too interfering – your mother does still want “to send you to your room!”, you said Gary, which is a blurring of the parent and adult child boundary. You then added that Dianne got on well with her mother, but Dianne said that her mother did fuss too much. As to the roles and responsibilities exercise, you said Gary that you didn't recall any details although you remember it as being quite amusing. You sensed, Dianne that the women's group expressed that they expected more from their future marriages and that as working women their roles and home would not be that of their mothers. You added, Gary that there is a blurring of the lines between the role of man and wife in the modern day marriage.

You both expressed the view that the session ***Communication, conflict and listening*** had been a key session for you. You said Gary that you tend to be precise and practical in your everyday living and that you had tended to be dismissive in the past

when the other does not immediately “get it”. You had learned from that session that it may be necessary to put yourself in the other person’s shoes. It has been a “good session” for you Dianne. You did not believe that you were good at communication and that this session had made you consider your communication skills. You recall that the two of you discussed this session and its implications afterwards. You said, Gary that communication still comes up in your relationship and you added Dianne that when you look to your friends you realise that they could communicate better in their marriages. You added further, Gary that communication is the most important aspect of marriage and requires to be looked at afresh.

You had experienced the session ***Love, romance, sex and children*** as rather light-hearted, Gary. You recalled the discussion around the issue of children in marriage and you remember being surprised that some couples hadn’t discussed before whether they were going to have children. You and Gary had resolved this issue prior to the marriage preparation course. You further felt that romance perhaps requires to be looked at more diligently during this session as many couples are living together and the romance of the relationship already tends to be neglected. Then you said, Gary that being married was so different than living together and in response to my question you expressed a sense of contentment, a sense of arrival in being married. For you, Dianne marriage brings greater security. When you live together it is easier to just walk away but with marriage there is this commitment to make it work; there is a vested interest in making it work.

The last session ***Growing together emotionally and spiritually*** didn’t make massive an impression with you, Gary. You did not recall the exercise where couples were expected to evaluate their emotional support of one another. For you the issue of emotional support is more a communication thing and should perhaps be considered under that heading. At the same time, you thought that self-knowledge through self-examination (looking in the mirror) is critical to whether one is able to engage in honest relationships. As far as the spirituality aspects of marriage, you said, Gary that this part of the session re-affirmed what one knows. You were surprised, Dianne that the course had been so practical and not more “spiritual”. You then expressed the view, Gary that it was right for the course to be more practical as this is what makes marriages work.

Reflecting on the course as a whole, you said Gary that it had been very worthwhile. You liked the way Keith allowed open, free discussions, but remained in charge, guiding the conversation. You hadn’t thought it was necessary to do the course but you had learned more about successful communication in marriage.

Thank you, Dianne and Gary for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship and may your business grow in prosperity, Gary.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Amber and Zach

2nd March 2007

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me last Thursday evening, 1st March concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course, which you had completed during **July - August 2005** and followed by your wedding on the 24th September at Christ Church, Constantia. We established

that your group was the first marriage preparation group that my wife and I took on our own without Keith being present.

In response to my initial question whether the first session, **Knowing yourself; knowing my partner** had in any way alerted either of you to possible significant differences (personality, habits, values) between you within the relationship, Zach you said that this session had made you look for the first time at the negatives concerning the differences between the two of you and in particular it reinforced for you that you came from an Afrikaans-speaking background and Amber English-speaking. On reflection, however, you noted Zach that this new-found knowledge only stayed with you for a couple of days. It was only when you were married that the difference in temperament and values and culture was experienced as impacting on your relationship. Amber, you said that you couldn't remember this session. You noted that it had been particularly difficult for you in the months following the wedding as you had to learn to housekeep and provide dinner for Zach. Before you were married you and your 13-year old daughter had lived with your mother where these services were provided. You didn't feel that this session had in any way alerted you to what could be happening in this regard in your marriage.

The next part of our conversations related to the session **Roles and expectations in marriage** and you observed, Zach that during this session this was probably the first time that the responsibility of taking on a wife and 13-year old daughter became a reality for you. On the other hand, Amber, since you were already living in the situation, you were all too aware of the responsibility that Zach was taking on and so this part of the session didn't necessarily alert you to that part of your future married life. You also noted that you'd been in agreement with the group discussions concerning the sharing of duties but that the reality was that it took time for the theory and the practice to be worked out in the marriage. You both said that in this areas of you marriage it was still a work in progress.

You claim, Zach that the session **Communication, conflict and listening** had made you aware of the importance of this aspect of the marital relationship and that you'd realised that you needed to give the other an opportunity to talk. You then said at this point in the conversation, Amber that to be frank you'd not found any of the marriage preparation sessions to be helpful and that you hadn't been prepared by this session for the first year of your marriage which been "a hell-of-a-year". You then confided that you both had gone into counselling during your first year of marriage because of the difficulty in communication you were experiencing. You admitted, Amber that you would shout and explode when Zach acted in a stubborn manner and that you had learned through counselling to remain calmer. You had also found it helpful when the counsellor gave you tips concerning men and their behaviour. In your opinion, Amber, you felt that couples preparing for marriage needed to know how to overcome difficulties in communication and that a greater emphasis should be placed on communication in this course. Neither of you felt that you'd learned how to resolve conflict during this session.

Concerning the session **Love, romance, sex and children** you said Zach that you hadn't learning anything new that you didn't already know, particularly relating to sex. You then disclosed that 7 months prior to the course you were experiencing difficulty with you libido which you'd put down to the stress of your father passing away two years earlier; undertaking building of you home; and changing your job. What you hadn't been prepared for in this session was that this would continue to be a problem in the relationship to the point where a year later Amber wanted to divorce you. You had initially gone to see a doctor and given some tablets to increase your libido but it was only during January this year that a doctor diagnosed that your testosterone levels were particularly low. What you both felt looking back on this session that it would have been helpful to have had an opportunity during this session as a couple to discuss your sexual relationship. I pointed out that subsequent to your group such an exercise had been introduced into this session.

You felt Zach that you weren't really prepared by this session for the impact of a teenage daughter on your relationship with Amber and you both referred to some instances where Amber had tended to side with her daughter at your expense and you felt hurt and vulnerable by this action.

Neither of you felt that you'd learnt anything during the session **Growing together emotionally and spiritually** and you commented Amber that as time goes on you both are learning to support each other emotionally. You hadn't however experience this session to be helpful in this regard.

You didn't have any comments concerning the way the course is structured and then you volunteered Zach that it would be valuable if in course the impact of the differences of personality were reinforced for the couples.

Your final comment Beverly was that what had stood out for you had been my comment to the group at the commencement of the course that statistically only one or two of the couples present would remain married over the next ten years or more. This you said had left a last impression on your mind and that you were determined that this would not be the case for the two of you and you affirmed the same position, Zach.

Thank you, Beverly and Zach for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Mary and Patrick
March 2006

Thursday, 29th

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me this past Tuesday evening (27th March) concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course which you had completed during , **September/October 2005** followed by your wedding on the 23rd September 2005 at Christ Church, Constantia. I particularly appreciated that you made the time and received me in your home and I was delighted to become acquainted with your beautiful baby girl, Sienna. She is an absolute darling.

We started with me explaining the purpose of this interview and we then recalled at this point that Keith was away when my wife and I prepared your group and that apart from your initial interview with Keith he did not participate in the preparation classes. When I asked what you could recall of the session **Knowing yourself; knowing your partner**, you recalled Patrick that this session merely re-affirmed that you both shared similar backgrounds and values, reflecting the social values of the middle class Southern Suburbs and you similarly said, Mary that this session just affirmed for you that you knew Patrick. You hadn't felt that it was that important to discover that you still didn't know your partner's shoe size. On reflection, you said Patrick that perhaps the questions weren't penetrating enough during this session to bring out the differences between you as a couple. I explained that subsequent to your group, I had introduced a lengthy list of values that couples had to evaluate and you said this would be more valuable than whether you knew what your partner happen to be reading at that moment.

You recalled, Mary that when it came to considering the influence of family during the session ***Roles and responsibilities in Marriage*** you both knew that it was still important to Patrick what his parents thought and you said Patrick that you had know your parents saw marriage as the next step in your relationship and by implication you were influenced by these views. You said Mary that you were close to your parents although you don't like to live under their wings. We talked a little about the delicate balance of parents wanting to help, particularly like now with your new baby and your resisting if you feel that the help is too much like interference. You recalled, Mary that you had discussed these issued after the session, as indeed you had discussions after the other sessions. Turning to the exercise where the men and women separated to discuss the roles and responsibilities in marriage, you commented Patrick that although you were vague about your recall of that exercise, you do remember that traditional views concerning the husband and wife roles were discussed and that the men did still see their role as caring and protecting even though it was acknowledged that this did not so much involve taking care financially. In fact you recall that the men found it difficult to know what their roles were in a modern marriage. You similarly recall, Mary that the women expressed the need for male protection and care, although also asserting their independence. You then mentioned, Patrick that the two of you had discussed at the time the impact that babies would have on your respective responsibilities and roles in the marriage. As it is Mary has stayed at home on maternity leave but she intends going back to work.

With regard to the session ***Communication, conflict and listening*** you said Patrick that you hadn't dealt well with conflict but that you thought you were better at it now. I asked what you thought brought this about and you said probably being married and having your first child. You also said, Patrick that Mary probably avoids conflict when she can and after some reflection you seemed to agree with this assertion, Mary. You said, Patrick that you now feel less the need to always make your point of view as you had done in the past. Neither of you seemed to have much further recall concerning this session including the discussion around resolving conflict. You both did however recall my and Mary Ann sharing that I need to resolve the conflict before we went to bed whereas when she is tired, Mary Ann prefers to sleep on it. You admitted, Patrick that you needed to get it off your chest rather than sleep on a dispute. However, neither of you seemed sure how you would resolve serious conflict in your marital relationship.

You recalled, Mary that in the session ***Love, romance, sex and children*** that the group again split into gender groups to discuss romance and that you'd been surprised that the women did not go for the traditional view of romancing such as flowers and cards, but rather that a special look across a crowded room at a party was far more romantic. Although you also said that it was romantic to make a point of doing something special together. The other aspect of this session that you recall was the discussion around children and you said Patrick that one doesn't quite realise how different it is gong to be until you have your first baby. You said that whereas before the baby arrived you would have spent time with friends of dinner or coffee, you don't do that now and that was okay. You said, Mary that it was so exciting to have a family and you nodded in agreement, Patrick. You added, Mary, that you now spend different time with each other when, you said with a smile, you try not to talk about the baby. Sienna is now part of your lives, an important part, but you said Patrick that children shouldn't be the sole focus of the marital relationship. I reminded you that we had raised this aspect of children in the marriage during this session. We had a short discussion of couples who either now are having children to patch up their relationship or older couples who are suddenly left facing each other as strangers when their children leave home.

You said Patrick that you recall experiencing during the session ***Growing together emotionally and spiritually*** that you were not as supportive of Mary as you felt you could be, although you had said at the time you didn't agree. I then said that I recalled you making such a statement. No further discussion arose concerning this session.

We did conclude this interview, Patrick with your saying in response to my question that my input had been particularly good and that it helped to focus the discussions. You also said that it would have been helpful if there had been a course outline given out beforehand.

Thank you, Mandy and Patrick for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship and particular joy with Sienna.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Susan and Paul

8th March 2007

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me on Wednesday evening, 7th March concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course, which you had completed during **November 2005** and followed by your wedding on the 18th January 2006 at Christ Church, Constantia.

In response to my initial question whether during the session, ***Knowing yourself; knowing my partner*** either of you had been alerted to possible significant differences in personality, you noted Paul that whereas you may have before seen Susan's caring as nagging, you now appreciate that she is using her strength as a care giver to look after the relationship. You observed, Susan that in fact you'd prefer not to know everything about Paul and that you'd rather be surprised about knew aspects about his personality. You have discovered during your first year of marriage that Paul has a strong romantic side to his personality. You again, Paul, said that this session reminded you that there is more to a person than the surface presentation of that personality.

Susan, your response to my question as to whether either of you had become aware of differences in values and/or habits was that the family value of each of you is quite different. You have learnt from Paul close relationship with his grandmother who lives far away that although you are close to your Mom, you could show more your love to your father who lives nearby. You observed, Paul that the family set-ups of both of you is very different and that it is necessary for the marriage to respect each other's family relationships.

When I asked whether either of you had become aware of a particular strength or gift of you partner that is of benefit to the relationship, you commented Paul that the entire marriage preparation course provides couples the time and space to explore and become alerted to the significance of your relationship. You said that one simple does not give the meaning of the marriage the time in the ordinary course of events, particularly the period leading up to the wedding. The marriage preparation course affords one that opportunity and if it had been practical from a time commitment point of view you could have spend six months on such a course.

When I asked whether either of you had become aware during the session ***Roles and expectations in marriage*** of the nature of your relationship with your families of origin, notably with regard to closeness, distance or dependency, you said Susan not really, while you Paul made the observation that in view of your long-term relationship (6

years) prior to your wedding you both had learnt most of what there is to know about your respective families.

When I asked about that part of the session where the men and women separated to discuss the roles and responsibilities in marriage, Susan you noted that you had been surprised that the men didn't come back with the 'hunter' image of the male. Everyone was respectful of the other in the marriage partnership. You commented Paul that the men had revealed their long-term goals that evening of establishing your careers, buying a home and having a family and that the equality of the marriage partnership was seen in those terms. You said that you and Susan balance out your roles and responsibilities at home, tackling the jobs as they come up. You are both very busy with your work and so it is a matter of finding a balance between your individual lives and the marriage. Since the week is so busy with work and you both come home late, you tend to chill out over the weekends, doing the chores together and then relaxing.

The third session **Communication, conflict and listening** was experienced by you Paul as a "turning point" in your relationship with Susan. That was the session when you were introduced to the 'knee-cap' exercise and you and Susan spent a good part of the night afterwards using this technique to express and listen to each others needs. Prior to this session you had avoided speaking about some issues in the relationship such as your need for personal space at times because you'd wanted to avoid conflict. The 'knee-cap' technique of giving each an opportunity to speak and listen provided you both with the safe forum to speak out your hearts. You said that since then you've not had the need to have a similar in-depth discussion but that you'd certainly use it if required. You noted Susan that prior to that evening you'd misunderstood each other concerning these issues but that subsequently you now have an understanding of each other's emotional needs.

As to resolving conflict, you thought Paul that the writing down and brainstorming the problem at hand was a good technique but so far you two have not been locked into a conflict situation that couldn't be resolved amicably. Your approach, Susan is to sort out the problem immediately whereas Paul sometimes needs time to respond. You commented Paul that again this shows how differences in personality can influence communication and conflict resolution.

As to what you'd learnt in that session about listening to your partner's feelings, you observed Paul that you had come to understand the importance of taking responsibility for your own feelings and that it was the feelings that brought up the discussion. You noted Susan that feelings do get hurt and you keep your feelings to yourself when you consider that Paul may not be able to respond to them. Yet, you both said that you have discovered since being married and particularly these last six months that you've grown closer emotionally – that you were souls in unison.

When I asked whether either of you had been alerted to how you expressed your love in the relationship, which was the first topic of the fourth session **Love, romance, sex and children**, you had said Susan that this was a difficult one and then you said that you know that Paul expresses his love in how he speaks to you. For you, Paul, the holding hands and cuddling expresses the closeness of your relationship, the outer physical expression of your inner emotional connection with one another. You felt that subsequent to the marriage course and the wedding that you were more in love with Susan and that you've come to realise the importance of relying on each other, being supportive of one another. You spoke about the importance of taking care of the relationship within the busyness of life, utilising the limited time that you have together.

As to keeping romance in the relationship as dealt with in this session, you said Susan that you feel spoilt and cared for by the romantic surprises that Paul has planned over the past year. You noted Paul that romance gives you the opportunity to express your love for Susan, that the care you take in planning the surprise makes Susan feel special.

Neither of you could recall that sex was discussed during this session and I noted that this did not happen with all the groups, although that I now do introduce a couple exercise where they are required to consider their sexual relationship.

As to the impact of children on the relationship as discussed in this session, you said Susan that you both have talked about having children and how you intend structuring your lives accordingly. You noted Paul that you both had an excellent support system with your families and that you would be able to make time for your children since Susan can work flexi-time and you run your own business Paul.

As far as the sessions **Growing together emotionally and spiritually** are concerned, you both said that although you had a strong spirituality and that God was an important part of your lives, you were not comfortable with going to church just because that was considered the right thing to do. At the same time you said Paul that you didn't want your children to grow up not being exposed to a church experience as you had been. You would like your children to have that experience. You said Susan that in today's world it was important that children were associated with other children within a faith context which provided them with a solid environment of values. At the same time you had a problem with some of your friends, Susan, who went to church on Sunday but then lived hypocritical, even immoral lives during the week. For both of you spirituality had to be an expression of all of your life. I should say to you both at this point that as a pastoral care giver within my faith community, it is my sense that the Church is failing many young people today in offering a narrow spirituality that does not reflect the realities of modern life.

When I asked whether you had any comment concerning the **structure** of the course, you noted Paul that you thought the couple exercises were an excellent opportunity for you to consider the issue at hand prior to partaking in a group discussion and you felt, Susan that it was good to have this space to consider things.

As to any other comments that you could add, you said Paul that although you'd not been keen on the idea of the marriage preparation you would have liked to have gone on with the group as this had afforded you the time and space to think and consider your relationship within the context of marriage. It was good to share within the group and learn from others. You had found attending the course to be most helpful. Susan you concluded by saying that those couples who did not do marriage preparation had lost out as it had been such a valuable experience.

Thank you, Susan and Paul for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Sandy and Dan
2006

22nd November

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed last evening by me concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course which you had completed 8 months ago, i.e. during **January – February 2006**. You were married on the 8th April at Christ Church, Constantia.

In response to my initial question whether the first session, ***Knowing yourself; knowing my partner*** had alerted you to or made either of you aware of possible significant differences between you within the relationship, Dan you said that there had not been any significant surprises during this session. You pointed out, Sandy, that you had been going out for 5 years prior to the wedding and that part of that time you were living together. You said that in that time you had got to know each other fairly well. However, Dan, you then reflected that during this session you had once again become aware of Sandy's vulnerability concerning her sense of self-worth and that in fact she has on occasion battled with her sense of self-worth in the marriage. We came back to this issue later in the conversation.

I then asked whether both of you had identified specific strengths in the relationship and you observed Dan, that during the same session you had spoken of Sandy's kind-heartedness. Sandy, the fact that Dan could say this openly in the group you identified as a particularly significant act of affirmation. You felt, Sandy that couples should be actively encouraged to inform the group of the strengths their partner identifies. I asked why you valued this, Sandy, and you said that the act of your partner expressing this in public you experiencing as notably affirming of your role in the relationship.

Both of you at this point in the conversation expressed the opinion that the marriage preparation course had made you aware of issues that are not usually discussed in the relationship prior to marriage. You felt that the couple's attention is so focused on the wedding day that the relationship itself does not receive much attention whereas the marriage preparation allows this to happen. Dan, you added that the value of the group discussion lay in the fact that there were differences of opinions which enables you to consider alternative ways of handling and responding to issues in the relationship. You affirmed this, Sandy, by saying that these group discussions would help by bringing an alternative and fresh perspective to ideas concerning marriage held by the respective couples.

We also briefly considered during this part of our conversation what you had learnt about your relationships with your respective family. Both of you had felt that again there had not been any great surprised apart from the fact that you realised Sandy how much like your mother you were and that pleased you. However, later in our conversation we returned to this topic of family with a slightly different perspective.

Dan you specifically mentioned the value of looking at the different personality typology schemes presented at this session and you both said that this alerted you to acknowledging and respecting the differences in your partner and that this facilitated communication between you.

I expressed a curiosity as to how this session (*Knowing yourself; knowing my partner*) in your opinion could be of assistance to couples taking into consideration that a significant number of couples these days live together prior to marriage. You expressed the opinion, Dan that the emphasis during this session should in the first place be on the strengths that each partner brings to the relationship and that these strengths should be highlighted to the group as a way of affirming your partner. Sandy, you thought that it would be possible to break these strengths down into specifics such as good habits, attitudes, etc.

The next part of our conversations related to the session ***Roles and expectations in marriage***. You observed, Dan that your ideas concerning the roles within the marriage had been challenged by this session. In particular you had changed your idea concerning what happens after your first child is born. Prior to this session you held the belief that Sandy would return to work shortly after the birth of your child. You had been particularly career orientated and it had seemed necessary for the woman's sense of self-worth to continue with her career after the child was born. However, during the group discussion when the men and women were separated to discuss roles in marriage, you had been moved by how your friend, Duggie viewed the role of husband and father in the marriage. Subsequent to the marriage prep course you both had

observed how several of your married friends who had their first child, the wife would stay at home to be a full-time mum. This had surprised you as these women had been so career-orientated but now the nurturing of their baby came first. Dan, you also noted how the babies responded to their fathers when they came home in the evening after work and you realised again the importance of the role of the father in the young infant's life.

Sandy, you at this point in the conversation noted that on your return from the honeymoon you went into bit of a blue flunk about your role as wife; you were uncertain as to exactly how a wife should perform. You observed, Dan that during the above-mentioned roles exercise the men had identified the male as the 'lion-hunter' while the women in their group had focused on the caregiver role of the wife. You reflected that this may have influenced Sandy to question the nature of her role as wife once you were actually married and you wondered how the minority opinion (which presented an alternative view on the subject) could be brought to the fore in this exercise. I had noted at this point that it was interesting for me that in other marriage prep groups I had facilitated at Christ Church a far more egalitarian view of the roles of husbands and wives had emerged from this exercise. You wondered, Sandy, whether it would help to mix the couples into say two men and two women but then we discussed the significance of bringing out gender ideas concerning marital roles by having a male and female group to discuss this issue. You did however feel, Dan that it was important to bring forth the minority view in this exercise and that couples should be aware of the different perspectives on marital roles.

We concluded this part of the conversation, Sandy by your saying that this was probably the most important session of the course. You said that we are influenced by TV shows and society as to the role of men and women in modern marriage and that this session gives one the opportunity to explore this issue critically at greater depth.

At this point in the conversation I returned to the issue of possible dependency on the family of origin as I felt we hadn't covered this topic sufficiently earlier in our conversation on the first session of the course. You recalled, Dan what our minister, Keith had said that when you become married you are starting a new family that has ties of blood to the family of origin but also functions as an independent unit. This in fact had become an issue subsequent to your wedding when your mother did not make Sandy feel at home in your family's house. You then noted, Sandy that Dan had stood up to his family and said that if you were not welcome in their home then neither would he be. I asked then whether this session had not brought out this underlying issue and you both affirmed that this was so. We then considered how it would be possible to bring to the fore such possible tension with each of the partner's family of origin. You felt, Sandy that it would be helpful if marriage preparation took place much earlier as nearer the wedding date the focus is on the wedding day and everyone tends to be united in getting this organised. You further expressed the view that an exercise could be introduced during this sessions that enabled the couple to consider how to deal with one's In-laws.

We now turned our attention to the session **Communication, conflict and listening** and you immediately noted, Dan the significance of Arnold Moll's "knee-cap" exercise. You said that you did not easily express you feelings and this exercise had been tough on you but that it had been most beneficial. The "knee-cap" of method of communication within a marital relationship where the couple is required to listen respectfully and with full attention to the other is a most useful tool, you affirmed, Dan. Although you do not use it perhaps as much as you should, you said, you have learnt the importance of setting time aside for the relationship, to focus on what's happening in the relationship rather than all the other stuff that tends to crowd out our days and lives. Sandy, you said that you learnt more about Dan during this session when this exercise was introduced.

Dan you said that it had also been particularly helpful to you during this session to learn ways of resolving conflict creatively. In your family of origin contentious issues tend to

be swept under the carpet, you said, but now you have learnt to come out of your comfort zone and to confront issues by talking about them.

You both felt that communication is such an important issue in marriage that perhaps two sessions should be devoted to it. Sandy, you said that in particular it would be helpful to bring out how family communication differs and how this influences each partner in their communication.

Dan you then said that greater emphasis should be placed in this session on the importance of listening in relationship communication. I need to comment at this point, Dan, that “listening” is an important aspect of this session and I am obviously here at fault not to have emphasised this more strongly during this particular session.

You both felt that the aspect that stood out strongly in the session **Love, romance, sex and children** was the issue of children. This had been an important session for you both since you had not been in agreement as to when you'd have children and this afforded you the opportunity to discuss this matter. This has helped you both in your present situation where you are trying to fall pregnant with the related frustrations and disappointments that go with that. You had felt the group discussion that followed the introduction of the children issue was interesting and you suggested, Dan, that perhaps the group could be encouraged to discuss the issue of whether the couple shares with their extended family, friends and the wider community when they are intending to have children. You both expressed the view that there is considerable pressure being placed on newly-weds as to when they are going to have children and this is something that needs to be considered by the couples in marriage preparation. You felt, Sandy that the issue of children need perhaps greater emphasis in this session.

At the same time, Dan, you felt that this session did bring home to you the need to keep the romance alive in your marital relationship and you acknowledge, Sandy the importance for you to be romanced by Dan.

We then turned our attention to the last session, namely **Growing together emotionally and spiritually**. You expressed the view, Dan that overall the course had prepared you for the moment when the two of you stood before the altar, when the full impact of what you were undertaking hit you. You recall from the wedding sermon that Keith had said all the work had now been done and the time had come for you to be married. You felt mentally and emotionally prepared to be married.

We concluded our conversation by briefly considering the structure of the course and you both expressed the view that the group discussions were the most valuable aspect of the course. It was during these group discussions that you were introduced to alternative views and opinions and were challenged to consider your own positions on a number of issues relating to marriage.

Sandy, you also mentioned that you doubted whether the concept of the mentor couple was going to work. You felt that you were more likely to trust my wife and I with any marital problems that you may experience than you would with the mentor couple who were introduced during the last session of the course. Such trust can only be developed when you have come some way with a couple and done a course together as we did on this marriage prep course.

Finally, as a last thought of anything else that could be added or done differently on the course, you had suggested, Sandy that perhaps it would be a good idea to receive the contact details of all the couples doing the course with you so that you would be able to communicate with one another, if one chose to do so, after the course had concluded. You also added that it had been a valuable experience for you to have had *this* time to reflect on the course and what it has meant to your marriage.

I thank you, Sandy and Dan for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful. I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Bronwyn and Glenn
2007

Monday, 23rd April

You must have wondered what happened to me after our interview on April 4 in the Library at Christ Church. I had written this letter the following day but left it to edit later and then what with the school holidays my practice taking off and preparing for another marriage preparation course, I had neglected to follow up with you. I do sincerely apologise and I trust that your memories of the interview are stimulated by my notes.

I thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course which you had completed during , **January / February 2006**¹⁴ followed by your wedding on the 4th March 2006 at Christ Church, Constantia.

We started the interview with me explaining the purpose of this interview and then I went on to ask what you recalled of the first session ***Knowing yourself; knowing your partner*** and I reminded you that you'd would have had done your family trees prior to that session. You recalled, Glenn that although it had been an interesting exercise that nothing in particular had stood out for either of you. There were no divorces on either of your families. You noted, Bronwyn that 3 children to a family had seemed to be the average on both sides, although Glenn's mother had come from a family of two children. You said, Glenn that it was striking that both families shared similar values and that is what you had in common as a couple. You then went on to say that you were different from many other couples in that you two had talked a lot about your past and therefore know a lot about each other's lives. It was your sense of that first session, Glenn that it merely confirmed what you already knew of yourselves and each other. You said that you already knew that you are the extravert and Bronwyn the introvert.

When it came to considering the influence of family during the session ***Roles and responsibilities in Marriage*** you recalled, Glenn that Bronwyn's father had been unhappy that you two were living together prior to being married. You said that you tried to persuade her parents to accept your decision but that they hadn't approved. In the end they just had to accept it as you had stood firm by your position. Now that you are married, everything is fine and you both feel free to ask either of your parents for advice, although you live your own lives. Recalling the exercise that focused on the roles and responsibilities in the marriage, you said Glenn that the fact you had already been living together you had therefore established your various roles, which is based on a 50 / 50 basis. You did say, however, that after that session there had been some minor changes. You concurred, Bronwyn saying that the session did make you think about your roles and responsibilities in the marriage. You concluded, Glenn by saying that although the session had been interesting, the two of you were already happy in your relationship and the way it worked prior to doing this session.

As to the session ***Communication, conflict and listening***, you said Glenn that as a couple you had come to an agreement not to talk to one another when you are in different parts of the house; that this habit did not facilitate communication. Bronwyn, you said that you recalled this session and that it had helped you as a couple to focus on talking about issues by listening to one another. You pointed out, Glenn that as the extravert you needed to listen more to Bronwyn while encouraging her to speak. You mentioned as an example of hearing her expressed feelings that she needed to spend

¹⁴ Two separate courses were run concurrently during this period

more time with her own parents. As to the conflict exercise, although you recalled it, you and Bronwyn do not experience significant conflict and that up to now you have resolved any potential conflict by compromising, either on a 50 / 50 basis or at other times maybe 20 / 80 or the other way round. The important point is that you discuss any issues that may arise between you two.

I then turned our attention to the session ***Love, romance, sex and children*** and established that we had not used Gary Chapman's Five Love Languages during this session. As it is neither of you recall anything of significance from this session, apart from the discussion concerning children. The latter had given you the opportunity to consider the implications if you couldn't have children and that after considerable discussion, you both had resolved to adopt if necessary but that you'd decide when the time came.

As to the final session ***Growing together emotionally and spiritually*** neither of you could recall anything from this session.

In considering the course as a whole, you said Glenn that for you the had sessions covered pretty much everything, while you said Bronwyn that the course had made your impending marriage more concrete, real for you. You said Glenn that doing the course had confirmed your decision to get married and that it had made you look all the more forward to your wedding day and that your love just keeps on growing for Bronwyn. You expressed the view, Bronwyn that the marriage course undoubtedly would make couples about to get married look at their relationship more seriously. You felt, Glenn that it is important during the course to create the right environment for partners to consider each other's position in the relationship within the context of the impending marriage. You also thought that differences between couples should be brought out and that issues such as significant age difference need to be carefully considered since such couples could find themselves at different life stages which would impact on the relationship.

Thank you, Bronwyn and Glenn for your time and allowing me the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me concerning your experience of the course. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Penny and Scip

12th March 2006

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me at your home this past Saturday morning, 10th March concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course and which you had completed during **May 2006** followed by your wedding on the 5th August 2007 at Christ Church, Constantia.

We started with me explaining the purpose of this interview but then before I started with my first questions, you had a few preliminary comments to make, Scip concerning the marriage preparation course. In the first place, you feel that with the marriage preparation course the Church is playing a vital role in establishing guidelines concerning the right values for marriage. It is important that couples about to enter marriage are exposed to an environment where these values are considered and discussed. In the second place, you feel that my wife and I as facilitators of this course are representing the Church in projecting these values. At this point, Penny you interjected by recalling that when you phoned Keith to say you wanted to get married at Christ Church he had said that you can't just get married but that subsequent to the interview with him you realised that getting married had to be done properly and doing the marriage preparation course was an essential part of that process.

As regards the session, ***Knowing yourself; knowing my partner*** and whether either of you were made aware of difference in personality, you recalled, Penny that you realised you were the procrastinator while Scip is the planner. You affirmed, Scip that there are significant differences between you two but that there in lies the challenges of marriage. In particular, as had been brought out during this session, rather than dwelling on the negatives it is your individual strengths that contribute to the growth of the marital relationship. For you, Penny, it was the fact that it is okay to talk about these things and that this has given you the confidence to communicate what bothers you in the relationship. Scip, you agree that is necessary to communicate the differences as they arise, not to hide them but to talk about them.

With regard to the session ***Roles and expectations in marriage*** and the Family Tree exercise, you said, Scip that this was for you a critical part of marriage preparation. You thought that if you'd been exposed to this exercise before your first marriage considerable heartache and conflict could perhaps have been avoided. Penny, you observed that when the time came for Scip to meet your parents and sister, you were particularly nervous, but he put you at ease as he saw you family so differently, appreciating their respective qualities. For you, the family tree enabled Scip to see all the warts of your family. Scip, you said you realise now that with your previous marriage, the differences between your own family and that of your first wife were so considerable and that this was at the heart of the unresolved differences between you two. In your opinion, Scip, young couples need to be made aware of the possible baggage that one brings into the marital relationship from one's respective family background. You thought that although this was a sensitive matter, it may be useful to raise the possible areas of different family background such as finance, social values, religious beliefs, etc. You added, Penny that the family tree provides the forum for couples to talk about the personalities of their respective families. You felt, Scip that couples need to be warned of the pressure that differences in family background can place on the marriage.

You thought, Penny that the roles and responsibilities exercise was brilliant as it afforded the couples the opportunity to look at what part these will play in the marital relationship. You observed, Scip that roles and responsibilities have changed since our parent's time and that modern economic pressures and social values make it impossible for the traditional view of marriage to survive. You suggested, Scip that it may be helpful to precede this exercise with some input on the generational changes and to clarify these changes within the context of economic, social and other reasons.

Concerning the session ***Communication, conflict and listening*** you said Scip that the 'knee-cap' exercise reinforced for you the need to communicate, although you

admitted not to have used this particular communication approach subsequently in your marriage. You said Penny that you had come to understand out of this session that when it comes to a conflict situation you need to think about what you are about to say and not to just react as this is not necessarily the right action to take. In your opinion, Scip, the Church has an important role to play when it comes to unresolved conflict in marriage, through prayer and counselling. You both feel that the role of an objective intermediary could be helpful to point out the differences of approach that is causing the conflict in the relationship.

As to the session ***Love, romance, sex and children***, you remember it very well, you said Scip. Expressing love in the marriage is a work in progress for you and you realise from that session the importance of making a special time for the marital relationship. It doesn't have to be a big thing; just the effort of giving attention to the relationship is what counts. Penny, you said that the relationship is the first to be squashed by the pressures of life. It is ironic that even though this is the most important aspect of the marriage, because it doesn't have 'substance' like a job or the children, the relationship is often neglected. You now however have the confidence to honestly express your feelings and needs within the relationship.

Scip you said that romance is an important aspect of maintaining the relationship, but that it was necessary for you partner to give you information concerning their needs for you to be in a position to gratify them. For you, Penny it is important to listen to your inner voice and to have the confidence to communicate your perception to your partner. You confirmed, Scip that listening to and heeding Penny's intuition is a critical aspect of keeping the relationship on track.

As far as children in the marriage are concerned, you said Scip that this is the hardest aspect of being married, keeping a balance between the demands of parenting and maintaining the marital relationship. It is important for the strengths of both partners to be used in parenting. You noted, Penny that with your first husband, you had carried the full load of parenting and that it has been quite different with Scip. Initially you were insecure, afraid that your weaknesses would be shown up, but Scip has been fantastic and part of parenting right from the beginning. He has shown that it is okay to ask for help.

The session dealing with ***Growing emotionally and spiritually in marriage*** was the sealing wax on everything for you, Penny. Although your previous husband had been a Christian, it has been Scip's spirituality that has enabled you to grow in your own faith and gave you the confidence to have a wedding in Church. You have come to realise that one does not have to be alone in life and that you are experiencing the joy of a marital partnership. You said, Scip that in your previous marriage you had missed it enormously sharing a faith with your wife. You find great comfort going to the Sunday evening service and see the Church as a faith community that provides the supportive context within which we find meaning.

You were impressed, Penny by the young couples' commitment to get it right from the start of their marriages by doing the preparation course. Scip, you see the group context of the course as a vital part in the learning experience of the couples and you concluded Penny that young people have the confidence these days to speak their minds in such a context.

Thank you, Penny and Scip for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship and your large family as well as good luck with the renovation of your new home.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Adele and Neil
March 2006

Thursday, 29th

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me this past Monday evening (26th March) concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course which you had completed during , **August 2006** followed by your wedding on the 23rd September 2006 at Christ Church, Constantia.

We started with me explaining the purpose of this interview and I then asked you what you recalled of the session ***Knowing yourself; knowing my partner*** and in particular the family tree. You recalled Adele that both of your parents and grandparents was still married – which was a role model for you two – while you had been struck by the longevity on your side of the family, Neil. You added, Adele that Neil had a greater knowledge of his grandparents than you. You both felt that although you had not gone away from this session with any new knowledge about your families of origin, it had sharpened issues for you. Although we had not done the Enneagram in during this course, you had picked up, Neil that Adele does tend to adopt a perfectionist stance, particularly in household matters. You said, Adele that you had enjoyed this session as it affirmed what you knew about yourself and Neil and this was comforting. You concluded that you'd welcome an opportunity to learn more about each other through a formal course.

We then turned to the session ***Roles and expectations in Marriage*** and you recalled, Neil that you had not learned anything new about your relationship with your families and their influence in your lives. You and Adele had already been together for some time and got on well with both your families. You noted, Adele that interestingly your father had adopted the traditional male leadership role in your family but that as he got older this changed and he has taken on different, non-traditional roles. What had stood out for you, Adele of this session was the opportunity to listen to and compare your views with those of the other couples, even though one has to make one's own benchmark for oneself.

The outstanding aspect of the session ***Communication, conflict and listening*** for both of you was the need to "listen" to your partner. You had experienced it as valuable during this session, Neil for both partners to listen to one another. In fact, Adele, for you this session had been the *most significant of the whole course* as you discovered the delight of hearing Neil express his feelings and needs (the exercise had been about to listen to your partner's views about aspect of the wedding that bothered them). You noted, Adele, that Neil is more open now about expressing his feelings about issues that bothers him. You affirmed this view, Neil that you found it easier now to express you feelings about personal issues to Adele, although you still held back when the matter didn't seem to important.

Adele, you were the one to recall the five loves of Gary Chapman that was raised during the session ***Love, romance, sex and children*** and that you personally liked all five ways of expressing love. You however said that Neil is one to express his love mainly through "action", doing things for you. When we looked at romance, you again said that Neil is romantic in the way he will do things for you such as buying an air ticket for you to go and see your family overseas. At this point we briefly talked about the tension between the demands of work and the relationship as discussed during this session. You have been particularly busy at work, Neil these last past months as your firm submitted plans for the Green Point Stadium and we agreed that the demands of

work is a reality that one constantly should monitor in terms of its possible negative impact on the relationship. You vaguely recalled that we had done an exercise on sexual relations but it was not clear what the nature of the exercise had been. You thought, Adele that I had given the couples the exercise to take home and one wonders whether it had in fact been done. Concerning the issue of children in marriage, you said Neil that you certainly discussed this during the session and that you both had agreed on waiting at least a year before having children and that you were still on track as far as this goal is concerned. You valued the fact that the session focused on the possible impact of children on the marital relationship and perhaps this could be even more emphasized.

As far as the session ***Growing together emotionally, spiritually***, you said, Neil that since you had been lived together prior to the course (February - September), you had learned as a couple to deal with the reality of sharing lives and learning to compromise. In response to Neil's observation, Adele you recalled that at the time of the marriage preparation course you were experiencing considerable work-related stress and Neil had been wonderfully supportive as you went through that experience and changed jobs. The course therefore merely highlighted the reality of learning to share your lives and experiencing the other as being emotionally supportive during times of stress and other personal difficulties. As regards the spiritual aspect of your marriage, you both admitted to not going to church regularly and you said Adele that Neil would accompany you to the Easter service and at Christmas. You said, Adele that you two came from different denominational backgrounds: Neil was confirmed as an Anglican, while your parents were Baptist and your father was still particularly active in his faith community. You admitted, Neil that you hadn't had the need to go to church services as an expression of your own spirituality. You recall your friend Ian who also had not had a need to go to church until he had terminal cancer and then he turned to the church. You had thought at the time that this was not right although you said you'd probably do the same. Adele, you made the observation that when one is partaking in a church service that one should be feeling the words and imagery that you are singing and that neither of you had that experience when attending church.

Reflecting on the course as a whole, you said Neil that during the first session there had been some deathly silences as everyone was afraid to speak their minds and that this was rather awkward. Now that I reflect back on that session, I recall that we hadn't introduced our "warm-up" exercise that encouraged the couples to talk to one another as they made comparisons with regard to their wedding day. I therefore agree with you that just to start the session cold with the usually self-introductions is a bit daunting. You said, however, that as the session developed and subsequent sessions, that you were glad you'd done the course. You thought Adele that it was particularly helpful for the couples to first discuss the issues raised by the various exercises within the couple before speaking out in the larger group. You also said that friends of yours who'd done the course were glad they'd done marriage preparation.

Thank you, Adele and Neil for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship.

With the warmest regards

Matthew

Dear Caryn and Mark
April 2007

Wednesday, 25th

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by me last night concerning your experiences of the Christ Church marriage preparation course which you had completed during **October 2006**, followed by your wedding on the 31st March 2007 at Christ Church, Constantia.

We started with me explaining the purpose of this interview and I then asked you what you recalled of the session **Knowing yourself; knowing my partner** and in particular the family tree. You responded, Mark by saying that since you had known each other for some 10 years prior to your marriage, no real surprises were discovered by you during the exercises of this session. However, there had been some surprised discoveries within your family tree that was little known amongst your family members, Mark. You had shared this new knowledge with Caryn and you concurred, Caryn that that part of Mark's family background had been an unknown for you. Although this revelation has not had any significant impact on your relationship, nevertheless to be afforded the opportunity to share one another's family trees had been a useful exercise. The part of this session that had stood out for you, Mark had been the Enneagram exercise and the sharing with your partner your respective personality differences, perspectives and values had been an eye-opening experience. In fact you would have liked to have spent more time on this particular exercise to unpack further the new knowledges about your respective personality tendencies, although you did also concede that for other couples this may not be experienced as such a defining moment. As to the exercise where the couples compared a list of 16 values pertaining to relationship, you had both found this to a helpful exercise, although you could only vaguely recall doing it.

We then turned to the session **Roles and expectations in Marriage** and I asked you what you recalled of the exercise and discussion as to whether you are free to marry and you responded Caryn by saying that you remember the exercise as you had wondered how Mark would cope with your mother's need for constant verbal communication with you. It had been good to be afforded the opportunity to talk about the potential impact of family on your new marital relationship. You confirmed, Mark that this exercise high-lighted again the different ways of communication of your respective families. In your case, Mark, your family tends to be less verbal in their communication with one another whereas Caryn's family are very open and verbal in their sharing with each other. At the same time this exercise enabled you to consider how you were going to deal with these different communication lifestyles, particularly when relating to your parents (and parents-in-law). When it came to the roles and responsibilities part of this session, Mark you do not recall this exercise. However, Caryn you said that you remembered well this exercise. You went on to say that you both had talked about these issues prior to the course and that you had already come to an understanding as to your respective roles and responsibilities within your marriage.

Concerning the session **Communication, conflict and listening**, Caryn you recall very well the knee-cap communication method as a useful tool that you both had learnt together. It was good that this was something you had discovered together rather than one learning from the other. You were sure that you'd use this method of discussing difficult issues within the relationship. For you, Mark, this exercise had once again highlighted the differences in you respective backgrounds concerning styles of communication. As to the conflict resolution exercise, you also recall this Caryn and in fact you have subsequently tried to use this approach where the couple together take a stand against the problem rather than one or other of the marriage partners being the problem.

There had been no surprises for you in the session **Love, romance, sex and children**, Mark, whereas you disagreed on this point, Caryn, saying that in considering the five love languages of Gary Chapman you had come to the realisation that Mark had a

particular need for physical affection and that you were now more aware of the differences in expressing love within the relationship. The only other aspect of this session that stood out for both of you was the discussions around children. You said Caryn that this had brought up stuff for you to talk about both during the session and afterwards. You could recall that you had discussed this during your lunch after the workshop on the Saturday.

As to the session ***Growing together emotionally, spiritually*** you said Caryn that you recall how difficult you found it to verbalise your feelings during exercise while you said Mark that you do not recall anything about any of this nor of the session concerning spirituality.

When I asked you what had stood out for you in the course, you both agreed that it had been the personality typing exercise, the knee-cap communication tool and the fact that the course afforded couples the space and time to talk about their relationship and how they choose to relate to one another. You then said Mark that for you the Enneagram session in particular had been meaningful and that you would have liked to have been given more time to work through the material. You added, Caryn that it had been particularly useful when this exercise was introduced to have Mary Ann and I share our own experiences concerning the differences of our personality types and how this affected our relating to one another. Our sharing from our marriage throughout the course had been particularly helpful. It had also been a defining understanding for you Mark when Keith made the forceful point that you had not found your soul mate and that marriage is a process of commitment and re-commitment as one changes over time. You also said that the course could have been longer as it was good to put aside this time to consider your impeding marriage.

Thank you, Caryn and Mark for the privilege of listening to your experiences and for your being so open with me. I found your responses to my questions most interesting and insightful.

I am very interested to use your experiences as recorded in this letter as part of my evaluation of the marriage preparation course and I therefore require your consent in this regard. At the same, when referring to you specific experiences, may I use your Christian names or would you prefer if I used pseudonyms.

I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you both well and joy in your future marital relationship.

With the warmest regards

Matthew