

**Towards a holistic narrative-hermeneutical premarital counselling model for couples
in an African context:
URCSA congregation as a case study**

by

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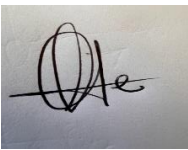
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AUGUST 2024

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled: **Towards a holistic narrative-hermeneutical premarital counselling model for couples in an African context: URCSA congregation as a case study**, is my own work and that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by being completely referenced.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Moeketsi Matsepe', written on a light-colored background.

Moeketsi Matsepe

DATE 29 February 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is dedicated to my late parents, Aaron Monnapule and Maria MmaJakobo Matsepe. Both my parents never got the opportunity to go to school but ensured that all their children were educated. 'I salute you! You have changed the future tremendously and I thank the good Lord for your lives. You left a legacy for the future generation!

I also would like to thank the following staff of Unisa, family and friends. Your support is highly appreciated:

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ABSTRACT

In 1994 South Africa elected its new democratic government and that brought about change politically, economically, and socially. The political change brought about new transformation that saw people in the society in particular woman being given new opportunities to participate equally in economy like any South African.

With the dawn of democracy there is an alarming high rate of divorce in South Africa. According to Statistics of South Africa (2013,) since the dawn of democracy the high rate of divorce is amongst black couples. Taylor (1994:184-185) adds that the number of “church” marriages is decreasing with the church. These alarmingly high rate of divorce in South Africa, has disrupted normal lives of couples, families and impacts negatively on the lives of children. Marriage is highly regarded in Africa. Today, it is unusual to find people who have not experienced divorce and/or been affected by its pain, whether in their own lives or in the lives of someone close to them.

The goal of this study was to find an integrated, pertinent model of premarital pastoral care that could be used within the framework of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). The study seeks to answer this key question: How can a URCSA congregation contribute to facilitate sustainable marriage partnerships among its members through a premarital preparation programme that assists couple to build sustainable marriage journeys.

This study was conducted through the lenses of the two theoretical frameworks, namely Osmer’s practical theology which is contextual in theory and URCSA Belhar Confession of 1986.

The study used a qualitative descriptive approach and has two parts. In the first part, relevant literature which relates to pre-counselling (premarital counselling), marriage preparation, divorce, pastoral care and practical theology is reviewed. The second is empirical research that is qualitative in nature. This implies that the researcher undertook fieldwork investigation to gather more information from participants.

Following a review of the literature and an analysis of the participant voices, this study suggests a comprehensive narrative-hermeneutical premarital therapy model for African couples.

During the study 18 participants were interviewed, some still married, some separated and some divorced, within a Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa congregation based in Northern Synod Region in Pretoria, Gauteng Province.

Analysis of the research findings shows that since most of the participants did not undergo the premarital counselling the experienced challenges in the following areas namely: conflict management, family versus extended family, failure to develop vision and mission for the family, management of financial matters, intimacy issues and family planning, and communication management in marriage.

In order to promote greater marital stability, establish a strong marriage foundation, and prevent or lessen the potentially high rate of divorces, this dissertation concludes by proposing a practical premarital counselling program based on the narrative-hermeneutical approach.

Keywords: marriage, marriage preparation, premarital counselling, marriage counselling, divorce, pastoral counselling, pastoral care, practical theology, narrative-hermeneutical approach, communication, conflict management, extended family, and intimacy issues.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

This chapter's introduction aims to provide background information on the research, which looked for a contextual premarital counselling model. It also provides some background information about the study and a summary of its aims, objectives, and applicability. Moreover, it offers a synopsis of every chapter in the thesis. Additionally, a few key terms and ideas from this research are clarified.

The goal of this study was to find and create a premarital pastoral care model that was both relevant and integrated for couples within the framework of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). The research was done at a congregation in Gauteng, South Africa. In line with the ethical commitment to confidentiality, the name of the congregation will not be mentioned. The congregation is located in a typical township that was established by the apartheid government, in an area that has always been inhabited by black people and that is impoverished. The congregation is one of several congregations of the URCSA Northern Synod Region that are based in Pretoria in the Gauteng Province.

The research was carried out with a view to attempt to develop a model/framework that would help to do the following:

- Establish a strong foundation for marriage;
- Prevent and/or alleviate the potentially high rate of divorces; and
- Facilitate an environment in which there are relevant intervention strategies that would help to strengthen marriages and prevent or minimise the possibility of divorce.

Currently, most of the congregations within the Northern Synod Region have no premarital counselling programmes to prepare couples intending to marry for the existential realities of marriage and family life. The only process currently in place when a couple is planning to marry is to inform the Church Council of their

congregation of their intention to get married. Their intention is then read out as an announcement to the congregation for three (3) consecutive weeks (“banns”). This offers an opportunity for objections from the members of the congregation, if there would be any. In the absence of any objection, the presiding minister proceeds to solemnise the marriage.

With this in mind, the research was carried out specifically within the context of the congregation where the investigation is taking place, bearing in mind that prevention is better than cure. Implementing such intervention within the church is viewed by the researcher as a positive step that could help to prevent or minimise divorces. Thus, the study concentrated on pastoral care within a theologically pragmatic context.

All of the participants in this study were members of the URCSA church in Pretoria, Gauteng, which has many congregations across South Africa. The researcher himself is also an ordained Minister of the Word at one of these URCSA churches. Over and above the theoretical component of the study, an empirical study was conducted. The empirical component of the study included participants selected from an URCSA congregation within the Northern Synod Region.

The researcher chose a qualitative strategy instead of a quantitative approach, as it provides extensive information about specific issues regarding the nature and quality of people's lives and circumstances. Grove, Burns, and Gray (2013:705) argue that qualitative research is a systematic, interactive subjective approach for describing life experiences and their meaning. Additionally, the researcher can examine the phenomenon's depth, richness, and complexity in correlation with the principles of qualitative research (Burns and Grove 2009:51).

Data collection was carried out through face-to-face interviews and observations with participants whose marriages were solemnised within a congregation of the URCSA in the Northern Synod. This allowed the researcher to form a nuanced picture of the problem or subject under investigation, rather than keeping detached from the research participants in order to reach fair findings.

Some of the couples that participated in the research are still together in their marriages, others are divorced, while some are separated from each other or are in the process of filing for divorce (Annexure E).

In the researcher's previous studies for a Master's degree in Theology, the researcher undertook a study that made an effort to understand marriage preparation processes of couples at the XXXXXX Congregation in Pretoria, which is one of the URCSA branches in the URCSA XXXXXX and Northern Synod Region (Matsepe 2017:4).

From that research, it became clear according to participants, that the church (URCSA) did little, if anything, to prepare couples planning to marry properly for their future married lives (Matsepe 2017:86). It was in this context that a proposal was submitted, with the aim of searching for an integrated, premarital, pastoral care model for the URCSA Congregation where the study is conducted. Furthermore, it would be suggested that the model should be incorporated as part of Ministerial formation programme at the Northern Theological Seminary (NTS) of the URCSA. Currently, there is no dedicated module/course that equips future ministers of the Church with marriage preparation and marriage-building skills.

1.2 Background to the study

There is an alarmingly high rate of divorce in South Africa, which disrupts normal lives of couples, families and impacts negatively on the lives of children. Today, it is unusual to find people who have not experienced divorce and/or been affected by its pain, whether in their own lives or in the lives of someone close to them. There is a rise in divorce rates among black African couples (c.f. 2.1.1)

The percentage is too high in comparison to the past, despite the fact that black Africans make up the vast majority of the South African population (Baloyi and Buffel 2021:4). There are a number of reasons that lead couples to divorce. The institution of marriage faces serious challenges globally and in the South African context in particular. The divorce statistics testify to these challenges, which include unstable marriages in the country, particularly in African townships. This could be, amongst other things, due to a lack of proper marriage preparation or marriage counselling.

Other than proper preparation for marriage, there are the following challenges that contribute to divorce:

- Unrealistic expectations;
- Unhappiness due to financial pressure (unemployment and the cost of living);
- Power struggles between partners;
- Extramarital affairs;
- Opposition to the marriage from extended families

With this high rising divorce rate in the black townships, the study intended to search for a model that would prepare couples for their marriage in the context of the URCSA congregation where the study is conducted. The growing statistics on divorce cases points to the observation that the modern society is incapable of tolerating differences in marriage and of seeking help when problems arise (Buffel and Baloyi 2021:5).

The research was motivated after the researcher personally witnessed many divorce cases amongst his immediate close relatives. The researcher's elder brother experienced divorce with his first marriage and ever since then his life had never been the same. His marriage was solemnised in the church, but unfortunately could not be sustained due to a number of reasons, among which were a lack of preparation for his marriage journey.

As the ordained Minister of a URCSA congregation, the researcher also deals with many marriage counselling problems and dysfunctional marriages amongst couples in the congregation. Listening to the many challenges that couples are faced with, all points to the lack of a proper preparation process at the beginning of the marriage.

Another factor that motivated the researcher to initiate the study is linked to Mr and Mrs Raditamati (not their real names and known to the researcher), who have been married for many years. The couple dated for almost seven years before they were married and are blessed with three children, a boy and girl in the marriage and the husband's child born from another relationship, before their marriage. At the time they met, Mrs Raditamati was at high school and Mr Raditamati had just started working, after completing his tertiary qualification. During the courtship, the couple decided to move in together and stayed in one of the suburbs, against the wishes of both parents

and families. It is also interesting that both came from the same background of being raised by grandparents, meaning that neither was raised by biological parents. Mrs Raditamati seemed to be interested in the study, but for some reason believes that their marriage has long ended. Her interest lies in the preparation process, but she does not believe it would have made any difference to them. This is because her parents-in-law never approved of their relationship and therefore, with or without preparation, the marriage never got the blessings of the family or the parents. The parents of Mr Raditamati tried cancelling the marriage celebration and only participated in the lobola process. Mrs Raditamati believes that her in-laws hate her and the husband is not man enough to call them to order.

Currently, Mr and Mrs Raditamati are technically separated and Mr Raditamati has moved back to live with his grandmother somewhere in the township, while Mrs Raditamati lives with their children in another section of the township. Mr Raditamati provides for them financially but is not living with them. As their counsellor, the researcher has had many counselling sessions and discussions with Mrs Raditamati, while Mr Raditamati promised to attend counselling sessions, but never did so.

The researcher is of the opinion that in most cases, specifically the two mentioned above, not much preparation was done before and not much care and support was given after the wedding to ensure that the couples were ready for a lasting partnership. This may be in the form of marriage enrichment seminars and sessions with individual families (the newly wed). In spite of the fact that there have been numerous divorces in congregations, both among Church Council members and other members, the official structures of the URCSA have remained silent and passive, taking no initiative to address this serious situation.

If the statistics provided by Statistics South Africa and two mentioned cases are anything to go by, then a new proactive pastoral preparation model for building good marriages is definitely needed. In addition to preparation, there is need for ongoing care and support for married couples. According to Barlow (1999:12), a church has a responsibility to prepare couples to build strong marriages from the beginning, since Christians are as likely to experience divorce as non-Christians. Barna (1993:3)

concur and opine that premarital preparations seem to be overlooked in today's churches.

In the past, marriage was highly regarded and respected in the lives of black Africans. Marriage is considered an essential institution in many communities across Africa (Mulaudzi 2013:1). Most Africans saw marriage as a symbol of maturity, normalcy, and an important step toward maintaining societal continuity (Buffel and Baloyi 2021:2). According to Kalule-Sebati *et al.* (2007:89), "Like most societies, the institution of marriage has always played a central role in shaping the family in South African society". As the old hymn goes, "Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage". Marriage, as a highly important institution, should be well planned and begin on the appropriate foundation.

However, of late, larger numbers of families are affected by divorce. This could be attributed to the many challenges that society faces. Many marriages are heavily burdened due to unemployment; financial pressure and the high cost of living, just to mention a few. People are so caught up in life and its responsibilities that they do not put enough time into their relationships at home. Some blame it on the Church, suggesting that the Church has not done, or is not doing, enough to prepare couples for their marriage journey.

As a result, in the urban African communities where we live, it seems that marriage has become disposable: if couples are not happy with each other, they simply file for divorce and move on. They do that without any serious attempts to seek counselling in the church or outside it. Westernisation and urbanisation have also contributed to these changes (Khathide 2000:24). It seems as if there is nothing that can be done to solve the problem and divorces tear families apart with little or no resistance. Many counsellors and some pastors also accept divorce as a solution to marriage problems (Zikhali 2009:21). However, Christian churches regard marriage as a binding and sacred covenant, which should ideally not be dissolved. For that reason, churches have traditionally regarded marriage as inviolable, but the huge increase in divorces has forced many of them to adapt. The Reformed teaching on marriage and divorce is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Here it is sufficient to say that in its official teaching

the URCSA disapproves of divorce, but pastorally it is forced to deal with it on a regular basis.

Therefore, the institution of marriage is in trouble in South Africa and the divorce statistics provided above are a testimony to this. The challenges facing the institution of marriage affect couples in congregations and communities as much as anyone else. Whereas in the past divorce was rare and carried some stigma with it, today it has become socially acceptable, and both the longevity and quality of marriage relationships are in steady decline (Stats SA 2018).

1.3 Research problem

This research focused on premarital preparation processes in the black urban context, where the researcher is involved in pastoral care. The interest is in marriage preparation processes in a congregation within the Northern Synod Region of the URCSA. The congregation is not named for ethical reasons so that the possibility of identifying participants can be minimised, if not eliminated.

The Statistics of South Africa (2013) report indicates that there is an increase in divorces among African black couples. According to Taylor (1994:184–1855), the number of “church” marriages is declining within the church. The goal of this research was to find a premarital pastoral care model that was applicable, integrated, and could be used within the framework of the URCSA. At the time of publication, Ministers of the Word, and Sacrament in the URCSA as a whole do not follow any model prenuptial or standardised procedure before solemnising weddings.

Different Ministers utilize different approaches, and some do not even attempt to pre-counsel couples before they marry them. In contrast, several traditional Christian movements, such as the Catholic and Anglican churches, have long-standing programs to introduce engaged couples to the problems of marriage, with a focus on developing the relational skills required to properly weather life's storms. It is important to note that even in churches where premarital counselling is offered, it is often based on teaching biblical passages related to marriage instead of the fundamental principles of marriage and building strong relationships.

Initially and in the past, divorce statistics were known to be very high only within white communities (Matsepe 2017:24). In recent years, that has proved to be the case also within black communities. When the institution of marriage is generally in trouble, it results in husbands, wives and children becoming victims, faced with grief and pain due to unhappy marriages. The challenges of marriage affect Christian couples and the members of many congregations in our society. Thus, the Church and Ministers of the Word must stay close to the members of their congregation to enable them to be aware of their experiences and develop strategies to address such challenges (Kapolo 2001:131).

This certainly does not apply universally to all congregations in the township and even any URCSA community. However, it is necessary to conduct such a study in the church with the view to develop a model that may be used to create and build strong and sustainable marriages. The researcher, however, acknowledges that in some congregations in the URCSA, good practices to build marriage do exist and some have gone to the extent of being innovative to develop such programmes, for example the URCSA Pretoria congregation, one of the URCSA congregations in the Northern Synod Region.

Subsequently, the study focuses on premarital preparation processes in pastoral care settings. The research tackles the following issues facing pastoral ministry:

- Lacking or inadequate marriage preparation processes within the URCSA;
- A perceived lack of proper pre-marriage counselling and coaching skills amongst the URCSA's Ministers of the Word.

Out of these ministry problems, the researcher formulated the following research questions.

1.4 Research questions

1.4.1 Central research question

The study seeks to answer this key question: How can a URCSA congregation contribute to facilitate sustainable marriage partnerships among its members through a premarital preparation programme that assists couples to:

- Prepare black couples for a married life;
- Build their confidence to enter married life; and
- Provide marriage skills?

In order to address this central question adequately, the following subsidiary research questions need to be addressed, each occupying a chapter on its own.

1.4.2 Subsidiary research questions

To answer the main research question, it is imperative that the following supporting questions also be addressed:

What is the situation regarding marriage and marriage instability in the Black township context, taking into consideration cultural, religious, and legal customs and statistics on divorce?

- What ecclesiology and view of ministry are expressed by the present marriage practices of URCSA congregations?
- What are the views of congregation members on marriage preparation and stability?
- What theological insights from the URCSA's confessional tradition, particularly the Belhar Confession, can be used to develop a healthier marriage ministry?
- What kind of premarital preparation programme (or approach) will best assist a prospective couple to establish a sustainable marriage partnership?

1.5 Research goals and objectives

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:104), a “goal” is a dream, whereas a “objective” is the realistic measures that must be taken one by one, at the grassroots level, within a specific timeframe, in order to achieve the dream.

As a response to the above research questions, the primary goal of the research project was to develop a contextually relevant marriage preparation model or process. While the objectives of the study on the other side hand were to search for a marriage preparation model that would assist couples to:

- get a better understanding of themselves as individuals and as a couple;

- talk about issues that might not have come up while they were dating, such as financial, legal, cultural aspects of marriage;
- discuss issues of sexuality, family planning and parenting;
- develop the skills of honest interpersonal communication and conflict resolution;
- build skills and provide strategies to overcome tough times in the marriage journey;
- develop a better understanding of Christian marriage as a divine institution, established by God and to enter marriage as a partnership journey based on their shared faith in God; and
- evaluate their readiness to embark on a married life as a lifelong partnership.

1.6 Literature review and clarification of key concepts

The researcher found it important to provide a preliminary literature review that involves significant sources in the field and associated fields. In this section, a brief review of significant literature in the pastoral care and related fields is provided on marriage in the African vs. the Western context. Lastly, a few terms and concepts used in the study are briefly explained.

According to Mulaudzi (2013:153), marriage is considered an essential institution in South Africa and many other African communities. While the researcher is aware of the complexity introduced by the promulgation of the Civil Union Act of 2006, which allows and regulates same-sex unions in South Africa (The Civil Union Act No. 17 of 2006:3), the focus in this thesis is only on the traditional marriage between husband and wife in a heterosexual relationship. In the past, adolescent men and women were obliged to participate in puberty ceremonies to transition into maturity. During these ceremonies, young individuals would participate in programs dealing with sex, marriage, and family. They were made aware of the duties of adulthood. Kgosidialwa and Lopang (2018:34) concur that in the Batswana culture (this is culture subscribed to by the Batswana in both Botswana and South Africa), marriage preparation has long existed and was offered in initiation schools called *Bogwera* and *Bojale*. Both men and women were taught how to live in harmony with their spouses, raise responsible children, and prepare for parenthood and fatherhood. (Kgosidialwa and Lopang

2018:34). From an early age, children were taught cultural history and values through lullabies and stories, thus learning occurred by means of observation and modelling (Mwamwenda 1995:379). These initiation schools had an important part in marriage stability since young females were taught traditional women's tasks like as caring for children and husbands, whilst young boys were taught how to provide for their families (Kgosidialwa and Lopang 2018:34).

The researcher agrees, but argues that as culture evolves, it brings about change; however, not everything should be eradicated. In addition, the researcher points out that as people move to cities, such good practices tend to be diluted by Western practices, and many Africans end up copying or emulating other cultures, using phrases like: *Ke tlhabologo* ("It is civilization"). The African culture is also fading away as children attending the so-called "Model C" and "Private" schools do not learn indigenous African languages.

Mulaudzi (2013:153) goes further and states that before colonisation, such education was part of the society, even though it was done secretly. There was proper mentoring of young girls by older girls. Similar programmes also existed for boys through initiation schools (Mulaudzi 2013:153).

When the communities were colonised, these good practices were discontinued and the colonial masters did not make the indigenous mentorship programmes part of the school system (Mulaudzi 2013:153). Today, in some communities these initiation schools are still in existence but are no longer effective in curbing divorce. Kgosidialwa and Lopang (2018) submit that marriage is no longer respected and the current generation does not believe in following the way of the elders that were dominant in the early and mid-20th century. The "new South Africa" and its democratic dispensation have changed many things in the African context. Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) brought about a new economic landscape, where women hold the same and/or better positions as men, resulting in many men being looked down upon in the society and not being regarded as providers any longer. These developments, however, also have positive side-effects, which have led to the end of oppression and dehumanisation of women.

According to Mbiti (1969), these rites introduced the youth to matters of sex, marriage, procreation, and family life, even though in today's society this practice is not common. According to Mulaudzi (2013:153), African families flourished under these cultural practices in pre-colonial Africa. Mulaudzi (2013) goes on to say that because marriage was viewed as a crucial institution, young men and women were expected to participate in puberty ceremonies to help them transition into maturity. During these rituals, young people participated in programs dealing with sex, marriage, and family life, as well as learning about adult duties. Khathide (2000:32) concurs and opines that in traditional communities young people were not haphazardly given a lecture when they were about to get married; children were socialised from a tender age to become responsible adults. Preparation for adulthood and marriage, perhaps more than anything else, occurred during the of initiation states (Khathide 2000:34). Although forms of initiation may vary from one African community to another, there appear to be basic common features according to Khathide (2000:34), with circumcision of both boys and girls being one of them. According to Mulaudzi (2013:153), these initiation schools were known as *vhusha* and *musevetho* among the Venda; *byale* and *mosebetho* among the Sotho speakers; and *intonjane* among the Xhosa. In Batswana culture, these schools are known as *Bogwera* and *Bojale*. Today, initiation schools still exist, but they are no longer successful in preventing divorce (Kgosidialwa 2018:34). However, according to Kgosidialwa (2018:34), another type of premarital counselling known as *go laya* in Setswana is still in use. The goal of these institutions was to prepare children for maturity (Mulaudzi 2013:153).

1.6.1 Influence of Western culture on African culture

The researcher, much as he supports the initiation schools, which were unfortunately discontinued when most of the African communities were colonised, agrees with both Mbiti (1991) and Khathide (2000) who state that in today's societies these good practices are not as common as before. The good old system of marriage has been drastically affected by several forces of change in recent years, according to Kinoti and Waruta (2000:108). In their opinion (Kinoti and Waruta 2000:108), the main factors affecting marriage in contemporary African society are the influence of Western missionary Christianity and education, the new socio-economic realities, and the increased mobility and urbanisation. Mulaudzi (2013:157) agrees and argues that, sadly, most married couples follow European ideals and standards that do not reflect

the African cultural worldview. Nonetheless, Kinoti and Waruta (2000:115) warn that Africans should never underestimate the importance of traditional African values, even in the face of contemporary changes. Furthermore, the Church, houses, and other essential social organizations must play a role in spreading the healthy cultural norms of marriage, family life, and responsible parenting (Kinoti and Waruta 2000:115).

1.6.2 African context and Ubuntu

The concept of marriage in an African context, argues Mulaudzi (2013), is a bit different from Western culture. The researcher agrees, as in the African spirituality there is something called *ubuntu* in Nguni languages, or *botho* in Sesotho: “I am because we are; therefore, I am” (Mbiti 1991:107). A person does not exist all by themselves, but they exist because of the existence of other people (Mbiti 1991:107). When a person marries, they marry the whole family, including relatives. Furthermore, in African tribes, marriage involves more than just two people. Mbiti (1991:133) believes that African marriage is a complex affair with economic, social, and religious dimensions that frequently overlap and cannot be separated. Mulaudzi (2013:153) agrees and asserts that marriage among Africans is the central institution around which the entire social structure revolves. Marriage brings two families together in a culture, and for Africans, marriage is the centre of existence (Khathide 2000:32). Marriage was intended to be a lifetime institution.

1.6.3 Divorce

According to the Theological Advisory Group (1994:11), marriage in Africa was considered normal, natural, and completely expected, whereas divorce was deemed exceptional (Phaswana 2000:17). Everyone was required to marry following initiation because it was their sacred responsibility to raise offspring and carry on the family name (Khathide 2000:32). Mbiti (1991:133) asserts that “marriage is the focus of existence.” It is a place where all members of a community gather: the deceased, the living, and those yet to be born.

Since a husband and wife marry to establish families, to make children and to ensure the continuity of the clan, divorce was something foreign (Khathide 2000:33). In African society and communities, marriage is the key institution around which the entire social structure revolves (Mulaudzi 2013:153). Gyekye (1996:76) opines that:

... marriage is more than just an affair between two people who fell in love and intend to spend the rest of their lives together. It is a topic of great interest to both the male and female lineages.

According to Gyekye (1996:76), it is not uncommon for members of one lineage group to seek information about the potential husband or wife, even if they belong to another lineage group. The goal of these private or secret inquiries is to allow both lineage groups to assess whether the man or woman is suitable for their child or relative (Gyekye 1996:76). Marriage is a legal agreement between the bride's and bridegroom's respective families. However, this does not imply that the married pair lacks independence. What this means is that the couples are required to demonstrate an interest in things concerning the extended families, according to Gyekye (1996:76).

This culture contradicts Western culture, which defines marriage, according to Olivier *et al.* (1995:85), as a legal matter between two competent and consenting persons of different sexes who commit and bind themselves to live together for the rest of their lives. In Western culture, the newly-weds remove themselves from parents and relatives and set up their own home for their new family (their children) after the wedding, while this is not an acceptable practice for most Africans. In other words, in an African cultural viewpoint, marriage is a contract between two families rather than two people (Mulaudzi 2013:154).

Having stated the foregoing, it does not follow that African Christian marriages are immune to marriage issues that could lead to divorce. Mbiti (1991:145) describes divorce as a delicate mishap in a marital relationship when evaluated in light of the fact that marriage in Africa is a process. According to Mbiti (1991:145), "Once the full contract of marriage has been executed, it is extremely hard to dissolve it." However, the dissolution of a marriage leaves a significant mark on the community. Divorce is popular and easy in some African societies, while it is virtually unknown or extremely unusual in others (Mbiti 1991:145).

1.6.4 Reasons for divorce

There are several reasons that could lead the married couples to divorce, such as alluded to by Mbiti (1991:145) and Bujo (1992:116). The single, most common, cause of divorce in Africa is infertility – childlessness. Bujo (1992:116) goes further to state

that childlessness is perceived in most African communities as a personal disgrace, a kind of slur on the community and a social fault. In his view, childlessness has led to certain tribes adopting the concept of a “trial marriage”, which permits members of the tribe to enter a marriage on a provisional basis, until the wife’s ability to bear children has been established (Bujo 1992:116).

Two other common reasons that lead to divorce are domestic violence (Mwamwenda 1995:481) and excessive intervention by the extended family (Baloyi 2013a:46). Low levels of prosecution of and conviction in domestic violence cases have left many marriage partners – especially women – in a vulnerable position, since repeated abuse results in a violation of their fundamental human rights. According to Mwamwenda (1995:481), domestic violence can either be physical or psychological in nature. In most cases, it involves the husband beating either the wife or the children, or both (Khathide 2000:48). Some wives do beat their husband if she happens to be physically stronger (Khathide 2000:48). Consideration of the concept “marriage” now takes the centre stage.

1.6.5 Marriage

According to the Oxford Encyclopaedia of Reformation (1996:18), marriage is the institution by which two people are bonded in a relationship of social and legal dependence in order to start and maintain a family. It begins with a formal contract/marriage certificate that establishes the intended permanency of the connection. This generic definition needs to be explained in relation to African culture.

1.6.5.1 African Marriage

As the study deals with the Africanisation of a premarital counselling model, it is significant to point out right from the onset what the study means by the term “African”. Khathide (2007:309) correctly points out that to speak of “African culture” or “African religion” or “a characteristically African society” is to make a huge generalisation. Having raised this reservation, the researcher nevertheless utilizes it, bearing in mind and agreeing with Kathide (2007:310) that it may be misleading and dangerous. In this study when the researcher uses the term writes “Africans” he shares the view of Kathide (2007:310) that outlines and discusses views which are alive in fairly large parts of Africa, and which can serve as representative of religious beliefs in Africa.

As previously stated, marriage in African communities involves more than just two people (Kathide 2000:32). Mbiti (1991:133) observes that in Africa, marriage is a complex affair with economic, social, and religious dimensions that frequently overlap so strongly that they cannot be separated. Mbiti (1991:133) goes on to say that marriage is the focal point of African culture. It is a location where all members of a community gather: the deceased, the living, and those yet to be born.

For the purpose of this study, marriage refers exclusively to the union between one man and one woman. It excludes polygamous marriages, marriages (or civil unions) between same-sex couples, and marriages contracted in accordance with other faiths. This takes into consideration the African context, cultural dynamics, and issues of marriages in modern-day Africa, as Mucherera (2017:134) puts it. The African context encompasses the social, economic, political, and religious contexts. While culture refers to how groups of people establish distinct living patterns and exhibit their social and material experiences (Lartey 2003:31).

Furthermore, Lartey (2003:31) asserts that anthropologically, the culture of a group of people is the group's particular and distinctive way of life; it is concerned with the way in which patterns of life in a group are structured, with an emphasis on how these structures are experienced, understood, and interpreted. Taylor (1994:171-172) contends that marriage cannot be “fitted into” or “extracted from” a particular cultural situation, since different civilisations place different emphasis on different characteristics of marriage. Instead, marriage should be examined within its cultural context. Marriage in Africa is culturally and gender-based. Some of these cultural and social challenges need to be addressed.

1.6.5.2 Culture and tradition

According to Mbiti (1991:7), every “people” or “ethnic group” has a culture, which is constantly changing, whether slowly or quickly. The term culture encompasses numerous aspects, including how people live, conduct, and act, as well as their physical and intellectual achievements (Mbiti 1991:7). Most African societies, for example, would not allow marriage without some type of present (“payment”) of animals, beer, food, or other monetary things to the bride's parents and family (Kathide 2000:35). This entails the bridegroom paying a “bride price” to the bride's family, also

known as *Magadi/amolobolo/iloboloa*. According to Ndlovu and Mangena (2013:472-488), the payment of Magadi is paid to legalize the marriage in accordance with African custom.

The bride price is not a business transaction because there is no buying or selling involved, only a simple exchange of presents (Kathide 2000:36). Ndlovu and Mangena (2013:473) note that the bridegroom's payment is intended as a mark of appreciation and dedication. According to Ndlovu and Mangena (2013), lobola is an outward statement of the young man's love for his fiancé and a safeguard against unjust divorce.

In some societies the families may exchange brides (Mbiti 1969:140). In others, according to Kathide (2000:36), the bridegroom and his relatives must also provide labour, and in matrilocal communities, the male stays with his in-laws, working for them for a few years to earn his wife, like Jacob did in Genesis 29:16-28. Culturally and traditionally, after *Lobola/Magadi* are paid, the couple is regarded traditionally as married, and this is followed by a "White wedding" whereby the couple go to church to be blessed by a minister of the Word. It is a fact that cannot be denied that Africa has a plethora of cultures (Kathide 2007:309). As a result, Kathide (2007:309) points out that even within one country there may be remarkable differences based on tribal background.

1.6.5.3 Christian Marriage

Christian marriage is considered a component of God's creative design for the world (Taylor, 1994:178). Taylor (1994) explains that humans, like many of God's other creations, are made male and female. Furthermore, Taylor (1994:178) argues that marriage was bestowed upon humans before any disruption occurred in their relationship with God, thereby indicating that God instituted marriage. Bawa (2017:34) asserts that God created the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, and orchestrated their introduction. Bawa (2017:34) further notes that God provided premarital guidance, officiated the first wedding, and united the man and woman as husband and wife. In light of this, it could be argued that God is most knowledgeable about how couples should interact and therefore should be involved in their marital preparation to ensure domestic stability (Mark, 2013:75). Nonetheless, discussions

about marriage cannot be solely theoretical, as they must also consider African marriage, which functions within the framework of customary or traditional law.

1.6.5.4 Customary and traditional laws

From culture and tradition there have been unwritten rules which developed from the customs and traditions of society. According to Hulley and Kretzschmar (2012:177), there is tension between the affirmation of women (especially mothers) and lack of gender equality under customary and traditional law. Oduyoye (1986:122) takes this further and states that it has been widely argued that, due to the customary and traditional laws, women were defined within the context of the family in general and were accorded little status outside of that framework. Prior to marriage, the woman's life was ruled by tribal or clan traditions, and she was subject to the authority of her father and other male members of the family, clan, or tribe (Hulley and Kretzschmar 2012:177).

Furthermore, Hulley and Kretzschmar (2012) point out that, after marriage, she is subject to her husband, and, after his death, to his brothers or her sons. Therefore, socio-cultural traditions and laws must be understood in terms of the contexts from which they originated. It will be unjust to talk about marriage in general and African marriage in particular without addressing about gender issues. It is the view of the researcher that marriage in Africa, like everywhere else in the world, is both cultural and gendered.

1.6.5.5 Gender

Genesis 1:27 states that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God; male and female he created them". Whereas a person's sex relates to biological variations between males and females, the term "gender" has a broader and more nuanced connotation. The term gender extends these physical characteristics to form an ideology construct based on how society perceives biological differences between men and women. What we recognize and feel as "masculine" and "feminine" is socially and culturally produced as our "gender", which encompasses a complex set of roles, expectations, social and sexual behaviour (Bazilli 1991:8).

1.6.5.6 Divorce

The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Reformation (1996:490) describes divorce as the formal breakdown of a husband and wife's contract and partnership, allowing one or both to engage into a new marriage, however some couples divorce and remain unmarried for the rest of their lives. According to Khathide (2000:20), divorce in the ancient world required little formality. A simple oral or written notice Mbiti (1991:145) contends that for Africans, divorce is a delicate accident since marriage involves many people as well as the transfer of gifts in the form of cattle, money, and/or labour. As a result, once the whole contract of marriage is executed, it is extremely difficult to break it (Mbiti 1991:145). Buffel and Baloyi (2021:7) agree and go on to say that divorce is a social ill that has affected the majority of Africans, which is concerning, especially in areas where marriage was regarded as a vital factor symbolizing the focus of existence. For the purposes of this study, divorce in the context of marriage refers to two people's decision to no longer live together as husband and wife., by one or both parties, was sufficient. Simply put, divorce is the legal dissolution of marriage. It is the act of separating permanently from one's spouse and a renunciation of one's marriage vows (Mashau 2008:80).

Mbiti (1991:145), however, argues that for Africans, divorce is a delicate accident, as marriage involves many people, as well as the transfer of gifts in the form of livestock, money, and/or labour. Therefore, once the full contract of marriage has been executed, it is extremely hard to dissolve it (Mbiti 1991:145). Buffel and Baloyi (2021:7) concur and further state that for Africans, divorce is one social ill that has befallen the larger part of Africa, and this is worrying, especially where marriage was appreciated as an essential element signifying the focus of existence. For the purpose of this study, divorce in the context of marriage is a choice that two people make to not live together as husband and wife any longer.

1.6.6 Marriage preparation

Olson (1993:35) opines that the purpose of marriage preparation is a method of anticipatory planning to facilitate meaningful dialogue between a couple before their wedding. It is the act of attending a formalised programme to prepare for the adjustment to marriage. For the purpose of the study, marriage preparation includes efforts by Church leaders to assist couples that are contemplating to take their

relationship to a higher level. It is a good avenue that provides couples with an opportunity to learn about each other, and to develop better communication skills in order to build strong and healthy relationships. Finally, it is a process that provides couples with problem-solving skills to manage potential future problems by becoming aware of each other's qualities (Dabone and Adzovie 2021:11).

1.6.7 Pastoral care

Marriage preparation must simultaneously be strengthened by pastoral care. Komonchak, Collins and Lane (1987:34) define pastoral care as a practical visitation by church leaders to congregational members and the entire society in need. It is positive and seeks to stimulate people to fulfil their potential in all areas. In pastoral care the pastor, according to Komochak *et al.* (1987:34), tries to help people caringly to live as believers, although this does not exclude reaching out to them in their personal and spiritual need. According to Buffel (2014:297), there is a popular phrase in Africa that expresses pastoral concern for the well-being of others and for oneself: "In Africa, a person is a person because of other people". In this study, pastoral care is defined as helping acts performed by representative Christian individuals with the goal of healing, maintaining, leading, and reconciling disturbed people whose problems occur in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns (Clebsch and Jaekle 1967:4). It is a helpful ministry to church members in the midst of regular daily life situations. Pastoral care is a broad concept that encompasses pastoral therapy.

1.6.8 Pastoral counselling

Achineku (1999:45) explains that pastoral counselling is a specialised area of psychological therapy that has its roots in spiritual and religious beliefs. Achineku (1999) goes on to point out that:

Where individuals are bruised, the church, in its pastoral vocation, provides the balm. Where people have been battered, the church restores dignity. Where individuals are broken, the church provides healing. Where the people are buffeted by the scourge, the church provides comfort. Where people are excluded from society, the church gives a home.

In this study, pastoral counselling is defined as faith-based assistance provided to an individual or group of individuals in order to help them cope with life's obstacles. It also includes the monetary, moral, and spiritual support that a person or group receives

from others in order to maintain their steadfastness (Bawa, 2017:28). Counselling, according to Collins (2007:36), is the practice of providing support and direction to those going through challenging times like bereavement, making decisions, or disappointment. Furthermore, Collins (2007:36) clarifies that therapy, as a relationship of support, fosters personal development by assisting people in better overcoming obstacles in life. Conversely, pastoral therapy is grounded in religious principles and draws on theological convictions and biblical concepts (Waruta and Kenoti, 1994:5-6). As a result, Collins (2007:36) concludes that the goal of pastoral counselling is to assist people in developing faith-based coping strategies for dealing with life's obstacles in order to achieve personal and spiritual growth.

1.6.9 Premarital counselling

Premarital counselling must be included in pastoral counselling in order to reduce the difficulties that couples confront in their marriages. Many institutions, especially churches, believe it is an effective way to combat the high divorce rate (Zikhali 2009:10). The goal of premarital counselling is to resolve any issues in a relationship before marriage, as well as to prepare the couple for what to expect in a marital relationship. Additionally, it provides the pair with strong communication skills, allowing them to address difficulties as they emerge (Zikhali 2009:10).

For the purposes of this study, premarital counselling is defined as a component of pastoral counselling aimed at helping the prospective couple gain a comprehensive understanding of Christian marriage and its associated challenges. This process enables them to make informed decisions about their future together and develop strategies to address potential issues that may arise in their marriage (Bawa, 2017:29). Zikhali (2009:35) is of the opinion that the pre-marriage preparation process could deter high divorce rates and possibly build a strong foundation for new marriages, since premarital care and counselling lay a foundation for strong and sustainable marriages.

1.6.10 Narrative therapy/ counselling method

According to Morgan (2000:2), there are many different themes which make up what has come to be known as "narrative therapy". Morgan (2000:2) goes on to say the following three things:

- For starters, when someone refers to “narrative therapy,” they may be referring to specific ways of comprehending people's identities;
- Alternatively, they may be referring to certain ways of perceiving problems and their effects on people's lives; or
- Finally, they may be discussing specific methods of communicating with people about their lives and issues, as well as specific approaches to understanding therapeutic relationships and the ethics or politics of therapy.

For the purposes of this study, narrative therapy is defined as a therapy that aims to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work that positions people as experts in their own lives, which is why it is known for involving “re-authoring” or “re-storying” conversations (Morgan 2000:5). Furthermore, Morgan (2000:6) asserts that it regards problems as separate from individuals and implies that people possess several skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments, and talents that will allow them to decrease the impact of difficulties in their life.

1.6.11 Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics

According to Chisale (2020:109), feminist cultural hermeneutics emerged from African women’s theologies. The theory was conceptualised by Kanyoro (2001, 2002) and Oduyoye (2001). Oduyoye (2001:12) states:

Cultural hermeneutics requires that we take nothing for granted, that we do not accept tradition, ritual, and norms as unchanging givens, and that cultural relativism does not morph into covert racism and ethnocentrism. Life should be lived purposefully, intentionally, and consciously, and if this practice has been lost, we must raise awareness of life experiences and their consequences. Experiences must be analyzed not only for their historical, social, and ethical significance, but also for their ability to shape what eventually becomes cultural norms.

Feminism became identified with a women's liberation movement (Keane 1998:122–123). According to Van Loggerenberg (2014:18), feminist theology is a response to women's marginalisation in the church. Feminist theologians criticize practically every aspect of church practice that denies or distorts women's status as the image of God. According to Bons-Storm (1998:7), theorising on practical theology and the development of new knowledge at the end of the twentieth century was primarily dominated by men. According to Ackermann (1998:78), the dominant model for

practical theology in South Africa is the outcome of a male-dominated, Reformed culture in which the voices of women, the poor, children, and all marginalized groups were ignored. Feminist theology seeks to liberate both women and men by altering religious systems (Van Loggerenberg 2014:23). The fact that this study is done within the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, one cannot wish away the influence or ignore the effect of patriarchy, which is inherent in the Church that was birthed by the missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church, who instilled a patriarchal Christian culture in the lives of African church members. The approach of feminist cultural hermeneutics is based on decolonial theory, which holds that women must rethink African churches' dominant colonial interpretations of culture and religion in a liberated manner. (Chisale:2020:112).

1.7 Theoretical framework underpinning the study

A theoretical framework is a structure that leads research by depending on a formal theory, which provides an established, cohesive explanation of certain occurrences and relationships (Eisenhart 1991:202). This study was undertaken using the lenses of two theoretical frameworks: Osmer practical theology, which is contextual in theory, and the URCSA Belhar Confession from 1986.

- Osmer contextual theory and theology
According to Osmer (2008:12), context is the social and environmental framework within which an event evolves. Contextual theory and/or theology incorporate ideas from women's and feminist theology, as well as African theology. Intervention strategies are consistent with the applicable ideology and situation. For example, African theology considers the perspective of the African continent. Africans are thought to see difficulties and respond to them with their "Africanness". The contextual theory enhances the relevance of this study as it incorporates the socioeconomic, cultural, political, and theological contexts of the participants. This includes the condition that all the participants are members and worshipers of the URCSA where the research was conducted. Additionally, it considers the URCSA Belhar Confession of 1986, that contributes to ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the study's framework within these specific contexts.

- URCSA Belhar Confession of 1986.

The 1986 URCSA Belhar Confession articulates Christian truth and issues a call to action. It exhorts Christians to pursue justice, embrace one another, work towards harmony and reconciliation, and put their faith in God's faithfulness. Contextual theory and theology also includes African theology, feminist theology, and women's theology. Together, these three viewpoints help the researcher create a contextualised strategy for premarital therapy. Chapter 2 of this paper further presents a thorough overview of various theoretical frameworks.

1.8 Research Method

The research consists of two major parts:

- In the first part, relevant literature which relates to pre-counselling (premarital counselling), marriage preparation, divorce, pastoral care, and practical theology is reviewed.
- The second type of empirical study is qualitative. This suggests that the researcher conducted a fieldwork inquiry to collect additional information from participants. According to Mouton (2001:148), qualitative studies seek to provide an in-depth description of a group of individuals or a community and are integrated in the lives of the actors being investigated, resulting in insider perspectives on actors and their behaviours. Additionally, qualitative research is any type of research that produces results that are not gained by the use of statistical procedures or other quantification techniques, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998:10–11). It can apply to studies of individuals' lives, experiences, sentiments, and emotions as well as studies of social movements, cultural phenomena, organizational performance, and international relations. The interest of this study is in depth issues related to marriage, premarital preparation, and divorce, hence my choice of a qualitative method in contrast to a quantitative method. Finally, Rubin and Babbie (1997:26) characterize qualitative research methods as those that emphasize depth of understanding and the underlying meanings of human experience, with the goal of producing theoretically richer findings.

Therefore, during the investigation and fieldwork, much information was collected from the participants as per Osmer's (2008:37) research tool which includes the following:

- Listening to the couples and identifying critical identity during the in-depth interviews conducted with them
- Connecting with them through personal contact at their homes and listening with empathy. All protocols of COVID-19 were observed.
- The researcher putting himself in their shoes and trying to observe and conduct the investigation, taking into consideration their circumstances and cultural contexts in a more formal and systematic way.

During the research process, a qualitative technique rather than a quantitative approach was used, involving in-depth interviews with participants (Annexure D). According to Osmer (2008:49), qualitative research tries to comprehend the activities and practices that individuals and groups engage in on a daily basis, as well as the interpretations they assign to their experiences. It is also more appropriate for in-depth research on a small number of persons, organizations, or communities. The study meets the criteria for a qualitative method since it was performed in the comfort of participants' homes, which is the natural environment in which they live as couples and families.

Moreover, the research was carried out utilising Osmer's methodology and the perspective of the Reformed theological tradition (2008:4). To summarize, Manala (2006:172-175) identifies five essential Reformation ideas that impact the ministry of pastoral care and counselling in the Reformed tradition. These principles impact Reformed Christians' attitudes and behaviours, as well as their work and lives, and can serve as the foundation for pastoral care and counselling procedures. These principles are the five "solas" of the Reformed faith, which are "Sola Scriptura," "Sola Fide," "Sola Gratia," "Solo Christo," and "Soli Deo Gloria".

According to Osmer (2008), the four tasks that comprise the model are the normative, pragmatic, interpretative, and descriptive tasks as depicted in the figure below:

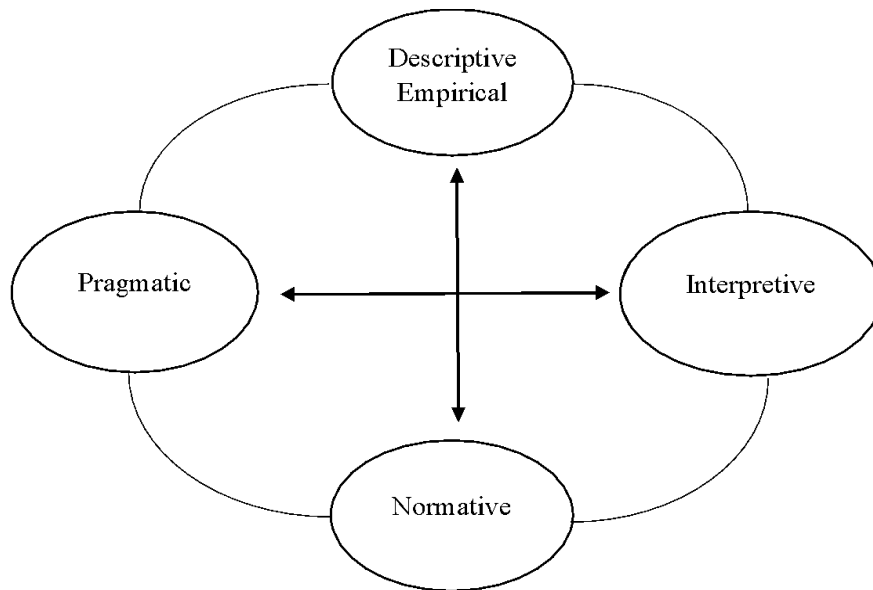


Figure 1: The basis of the pastoral care and counselling practices model

Source: Osmer (2008)

1.8.1 The descriptive empirical task – dealing with the question: What is going on?

This refers to the process of gathering information in order to discover patterns and dynamics among people in a specific setting or context (Osmer 2008:4). In order to achieve the study's goals, a qualitative empirical investigation was conducted using face-to-face interviews with study participants and structured questionnaires. The study tried to address the question, “What is going on?” by gathering and generating information in response to such situations. (Osmer 2008:33). To fulfil the research purpose, the researcher conducted fieldwork with 18 (Eighteen) participants utilizing a structured interview guide and face-to-face interviews (Annexure E).

1.8.2 The interpretive task – dealing with the question: Why is it going on?

This refers to using artistic and scientific theories to investigate and explain why these patterns and dynamics exist (Osmer 2008:4). This basic activity entails assessing, interpreting, and making sense of the participants' experiences in order to gain a better knowledge of their contextual realities, which are influenced and produced by internal and external factors. To achieve the goal of encouraging couples to discuss the current situation of their marriages, the empirical study's findings were interpreted in light of Practical Theology literature (Osmer 2008:80). As a result, the researcher was better

able to comprehend and provide an explanation for the patterns by drawing on theories and literature (Osmer 2008:4).

1.8.3 The normative task – dealing with the question: What ought to be going on?

The normative task involves interpreting the results of an empirical research into specific events, situations, or contexts using religious notions (Osmer 2008:4; 131). In this process the researcher consulted Scripture, the Reformed confessions including Belhar confession of 1986 and/or other theological sources to develop theological resources to address the challenges encountered when carrying out the earlier tasks. These complemented the insight from the literature, and the researcher's own observations and experiences. In order to get a thorough Reformed understanding of marriage as a solemn covenant between committed partners, an exegesis was conducted (Osmer 2008:131).

1.8.4 The pragmatic task – how might we respond?

This task refers to determining strategies of action that would influence a situation in ways that are desirable (Osmer 2008:4). Finally, conclusions were drawn from the study and some recommendations suggested to bring ongoing transformation or being transformative within the ministry praxis. In order to achieve the overall objective of the study towards a holistic narrative-hermeneutical premarital counselling model for couples which is contextual, a synthesis of the study results was done and recommendations made. This is the task of developing and implementing action plans that will positively impact Christian marriages (Osmer 2008:176).

In addition to Osmer's (2008) theoretical framework, the reasons why the qualitative approach and interviews as a method recommended by Mason (2002) are as follows:

- The people's knowledge, views, understanding, interpretation, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which the research questions are designed to explore (Mason 2000:55). The focus was more on the perceptions of the participants as they experienced marriage without or a lack of premarital counselling;
- It provides a legitimate or meaningful way to collect data on these ontological properties by allowing you to interact with people, ask specific questions, and

listen to them in order to gain access to their account and articulation, as well as analyze their use of language and discourse construction (Mason 2002:56).

Most qualitative researchers see knowledge as situational, and interview data collecting is just as much a social setting as any other contact (Mason 2002:57).

Furthermore, according to Yin (2011:7), collection of data for qualitative research can be done through interviews, observation, collecting and examination. During the research all participants were visited in the comfort of their homes for data collection (Annexure D).

Apart from the above, the following are further reasons that motivated the Osmer's (2008) qualitative approach:

- a. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants (Annexure D).
- b. The data was collected at family residences. The data collection was carried out by the researcher through observing the behaviour of participants while conducting the interview (Annexures A and D);
- c. This allowed the researcher to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study.

Therefore, investigation was undertaken around the premarital counselling preparations process and procedures that are in place from a pastoral counselling perspective, and made before participants got married, as well as mechanisms of ensuring the sustainability of the marriage of the couples. Current practices of premarital counselling and marriage counselling which are meant to sustain marriages in the URCSA were investigated and critiqued, in view of developing a sustainable model of family therapy in respect of young couples.

In addition to reviewing relevant literature, the study had an empirical component in which the dynamics and challenges of marriage were investigated in a black township. In this empirical component of qualitative research, in-depth interviews (Annexure D) were used as data collection techniques guided by and following Osmer's (2008:54) practical theological framework of data collection.

This is a qualitative research method that focuses on a single or a small number of instances that are thoroughly investigated over a set length of time (Osmer 2012:53). Multiple sources of information were used, including interviews, participant observations, analysis, and interpretation. This allowed the researcher to create extensive accounts of events and activities, resulting in a fully textured picture of the case (Osmer 2012:53).

1.9 Research Design

According to Grinnell and Williams (1990:138), a research design is the overall plan we utilize to help answer our research questions. As part of our plan, we determine what the research topic should be, what data will be required to answer it, who will provide the data, and the best method for gathering the data. Edmonds and Kennedy (2012:133) explored the qualitative descriptive design used in this investigation. According to their definition, this design includes participant narratives, individual or group narratives, particular life events, the circumstances or contextual elements that encourage these narratives, the connection between an individual's story and their culture, and the effects of particular life events on the participant narratives (Maake, 2017:15). The researcher believed that how to analyze data and verify study outcomes should be part of the research design, or the "total plan" mentioned by the writers above.

This study attempted to find an appropriate integrated premarital preparation pastoral care model for couples in the context of the URCSA, and hence chose a qualitative approach.

The researcher's goal was to examine and explain couples' experiences with premarital counselling, by employing a qualitative approach which incorporates an exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research design within a strategy of inquiry. Exploratory research is appropriate when problems have been recognized but our knowledge of them is inadequate (Yegidis and Weinbach 1996:92). Exploratory research designs are used to begin the process of learning more about a topic or question. The researcher used the explorative approach of inquiry as part of the research design because he intended to investigate the experiences surrounding

premarital counselling from the viewpoints of couples who had married in the Church. The goal of this exploration is to generate a research problem that can be investigated using increasingly precise and complicated designs and data collection procedures (Neuman 2000:19).

A descriptive strategy of inquiry was also used as part of the research design for this study because it allowed the researcher to look with intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment, namely experiences related to premarital counselling and marriage preparation from the perspectives of the couples themselves, and then describe what the researcher saw (Leedy 1997:191).

Contextual studies aim to keep participants connected to the larger context in which they may be involved (Schurink, in De Vos *et al.* 2011:281). The researcher's objective was to investigate and report couples' experiences with premarital counselling and marriage preparation in the setting of the Church where their weddings were solemnized.

1.9.1 Population and sampling procedures

According to Marlow (1998:134), population is “the sum of all possible cases that the researcher is ultimately interested in studying”. The population for this study is defined as follows:

- Members of one of the URCSA congregations in the Northern Synod Region;
- Whose marriage were solemnised in URCSA; and
- Who have been married for more than five years but not more than 30 years.

The study included a sample or subset of the population (Yegidis and Weinbach 1996:115). Qualitative researchers purposefully and actively select individuals for inclusion in the sample based on their knowledge of and capacity to explain the phenomenon or part of the phenomenon under investigation (Donalek and Soldwisch 2004:356).

Fossey *et al.* (2002:726) concur by saying:

Qualitative sampling focuses on information richness, and sampling methods should be guided by two main considerations: appropriateness and adequacy. In other words, qualitative sampling necessitates the selection of appropriate participants, individuals who can best enlighten the study. It also necessitates a proper sampling of information sources (people, locations, events, and data kinds) in order to address the research question and build a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under investigation.

On the basis of these insights, the researcher selected 20 participants, some of whom are married, while others are either separated and/or divorced. The participants were sampled purposefully from one of the URCSA congregations in the Northern Synod Region based in the Gauteng Province to participate in research.

1.9.2 Data collection

According to Fossey *et al.* (2002:726), interviewing, focus groups, and participant observation are common methods of qualitative data collection. As a result, for the purposes of this study, data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with couples, aided by an interviewing guide (Annexure D).

When the data being gathered becomes repetitious, a point of “saturation” is reached (Schurink, in De Vos *et al.* 2011:304), indicating that the data gathering process can be completed. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, and any indigenous language used was translated into English. Add interview transcripts as appendices?

1.9.3 Data analysis

Inductive reasoning is the foundation for data analysis in qualitative studies, according to De Vos *et al.* (2011:399), and should be implemented both during and following data collection. Prior to beginning the study, the data collected from the participants was transcribed verbatim. The researcher read the transcripts several times to ensure a better understanding and clarity. Creswell's (2013:182-188) methodology was used to analyze the data. The researcher followed Creswell's (2013) stages for thematic data analysis, which include four aspects:

1.9.3.1 Organizing the data

Creswell (2013:182) states that researchers often organize their data into computer files for examination, either manually or with software tools. Beyond organizing files,

researchers convert the data into meaningful text units, such as words, phrases, or entire narratives (Creswell, 2013:182).

1.9.3.2 Reading and memoing

The researcher selected two or three transcripts and read them multiple times to develop a comprehensive understanding of the information and reflect on its overall significance. Memoing, which involves taking reflective notes on insights gained from the data, was used to facilitate this process.

1.9.3.3 Describing, classifying and interpreting data into codes and themes

According to Creswell (2013:184), this stage involves the researcher giving thorough explanations, recognising themes or dimensions, and interpreting the data in light of their knowledge and viewpoints.

1.9.3.4 Interpreting the data

According to Creswell (2013:184), researchers interpret analytical results to derive meaning from the data.

The above steps are discussed in detail under the research method in Chapter 3.

1.9.4 Data verification

To improve trustworthiness, the researcher chose Guba's paradigm, as indicated by Krefting (1991:214-222). The Guba model (Krefting 1991) ensured the reliability of qualitative data. The four characteristics that determine trustworthiness are truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. These characteristic will be elaborated on in detail in Chapter 3.

1.10 Ethical considerations

According to De Vos *et al.* (2005:57), using the following definition: "Ethics is a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct

conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students”.

Marshall and Rossman (1989:90) argue that when people change their priorities and routines to assist the researcher, or just tolerate the researcher's presence, they are giving of themselves. The researcher is indebted and should be aware of this. This researcher, in agreement with the aforementioned submissions, felt the following ethical requirements relevant and carefully observed them while collecting data for this study:

1.10.1 Informed consent

According to Mark (1996:40), the concept of informed consent is central to attempts to ensure that every participation is truly voluntary. As a result, the researcher ensured that participants were competent to provide informed consent, i.e. that they were in good enough mental health to make independent decisions. To achieve this, participants were given enough information about the study to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. Participants were not coerced in any way. Participants were given informed consent papers after receiving all research-related material and expressing their willingness to participate voluntarily.

1.10.2 Confidentiality

Where people participate in a study, confidentiality must be observed and carried on throughout the study, and beyond. The researcher ensured this by adhering to the following aspects, as outlined by Mark (1996:48):

- By keeping all participant information confidential, unless the participants have given written permission to reveal it.
- By collecting and recording only the personal information required for the study to fulfil its goal.
- By keeping all information that could reveal a participant's identity in a secure location. This information would be accessible exclusively to the researcher, the person who would be evaluating the Setswana-to-English transcript translations, the independent coder, and the study's supervisor.
- After coding, all identifying information about participants is removed, and each participant is assigned a pseudonym or code. When the analysis was finished,

the original data was stored in a secure location and will be destroyed once the study is finished.

1.10.3 Debriefing

After conducting the interviews, the researcher has the ethical responsibility to debrief the participants, as the interview may have touched on very sensitive themes for the participants, which they may struggle to deal with later. The researcher established arrangements with local counsellors to assist people in need on an individual basis. It so happened that none of the participants sought such assistance.

1.11 Significance of the study

This study is important in the context of the URCSA, since the Church is part of society and since the divorce rate is escalating, the Church has the responsibility to build strong families that can sustain their marriages and counter that trend through good moral practices. Therefore, this study will benefit the congregation and those members who are intending or planning to marry in the future. Zikhali (2009:35) correctly points out that the pre-marital preparation process could deter high divorce rates and possibly lay a foundation for strong and sustainable marriages.

Unfortunately, the URCSA inherited structures of church leadership and theological influence that were cultivated and engineered within the Western culture of the Dutch Reformed Church. Therefore, the researcher attempted to search and discover a relevant integrated premarital pastoral care preparation model that combines the insights of both the Western and indigenous insights to prepare couples for their marriage journeys, as prevention is better than cure.

1.12 Limitation of the study

This qualitative study used a small sample of participants and concentrated on one particular URCSA congregation. Therefore, the goal of this research is not to generalize to other URCSA congregations. The researcher used an inductive approach and open-ended questions, which may help the larger church community

understand the challenges of providing premarital care and support for members of the church, even though generalization may not be feasible.

1.13 Contribution of the study to knowledge

The researcher is unaware of major activity in the field of pastoral care and counselling within the URCSA context. Consequently, by using the URCSA Belhar Confession of 1986 as a model, this dissertation aims to make a substantial contribution to knowledge through offering a new premarital counselling model that URCSA Ministers of the Word can use to assist engaged couples in being better prepared for their marriage journey. The new recommended model is more thorough, and the researcher believes that if implemented correctly, it will be more effective in reducing the ever-increasing divorce rate among URCSA members.

1.14 Structure and classification of the thesis

The study of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 establishes the context for the entire research by outlining the study's motivation, research questions and objectives, a preliminary literature evaluation, theoretical framework, and research procedure. It also discusses the significance of the study, definitions of terminology, the study's scope and limitations, and the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth analysis of academics' opinions from the corpus of published work, along with an explanation of how URCSA congregations' current marriage customs reflect their ecclesiology and understanding of ministry.

Chapter 3 comprises the descriptive task that looks at the status of congregation members' marriages, the difficulties they encounter, and the impact of marriage preparation—or lack thereof—on marital relationships. It also includes descriptions of the study's theoretical foundation, methodology, and ways of doing the research.

Chapter 4 covers the interpretive task of interpreting the existing status of member marriages within the URCSA congregation where the study is being conducted. This chapter presents a report on the empirical field work done with the participants. It offers

the actual data, the themes that emerged from the data analysis, and an analysis of the conclusions.

Chapter 5 embodies the normative task, which is done by means of an exegetical study of applicable passage to establish the fundamentals of marriage within a URCSA congregation. This will also include theological insights from the Belhar Confession, which emphasizes five themes of Christian community life, which also apply to Christian marriage: God’s initiative, unity, reconciliation, justice, and obedience.

Chapter 6 carries out the pragmatic task and involves the culmination of the whole thesis by providing a synthesis of the preceding chapters in a proposed comprehensive model of premarital counselling that will best assist a prospective couple to establish a sustainable marriage partnership. It also develops an approach that can be used by Ministers of the Word of the URCSA that could ensure more sustainable marriage partnerships among its members.

Chapter 7 summarises the findings and suggests topics for additional academic study

Table 1 provides micro-structure of the thesis.

Table 1: Micro-structure of the thesis

Chapter		
1	Introductory	Introduction, relevance, theological framework (Osmer), etc.
2	Descriptive and analytical tasks	Context analysis through a literature review: African marriage, Christian marriage, URCSA marriage
3		Empirical research method (interviewing, data analysis)
4		Interview findings and analysis (themes and sub-themes)

5	Normative task	A Belhar—shaped marriage (Contextual Reformed theology to create healthy and sustainable partnership in community)
6	Pragmatic task	A premarital counselling programme (based on Belhar and responding to challenges in c.2 and themes in c.4)
7	Conclusion	Short conclusion of the study

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT ANALYSIS THROUGH A LITERATURE REVIEW DESCRIPTIVE TASK

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter's introduction discussed the study's overall background and covered topics such as the motivation for the study, the research problem, the research questions, and the main purpose of the study. It also defined and clarified key terms and explained the study's significance.

A theoretical summary of the literature on the institution of marriage is given in this chapter. It explores more deeply the viewpoints of scholars from the body of extant literature, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.14).

Even though some of the literature this study cites is rather dated, the researcher still included it in the review, because these seminal works are still pertinent to the research topic. Key scholars for this study include Bojuwoye (2005), Bujo (1992), Mbiti (1991), Magezi (2016), Kiriswa (2002), Kimathi (1994), Babbie (1989) and the Circle of Concerned Africa Woman Theologians represented by Dube (2007), Njoroge (2001), Oduyoye (2001), and R.A. Kanyoro (2002), to mention just a few.

It is of paramount importance that the institution of marriage and family life is discussed in the South African and/or African context. This will set the foundation for a discussion on premarital marriage preparation processes and a search for a premarital preparation pastoral model. Literature on marriage as an institution will be explored, followed by publications on pastoral counselling and premarital counselling. Marriage as an institution is considered as it will enhance and lay a good foundation for the study.

2.1.1 Divorce Statistics in South Africa

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2021:307), black African couples divorced at a higher rate than other population groupings; this pattern has persisted

for the past ten years (2012-2021). About 9 175 (50.4%) of the 18 208 divorces granted in 2021 were from the black African demographic group, followed by white 3 652 (20.1%), coloured 3 202 (17.6%), India/Asian 881 (4.8%), and mixed divorces (499, 2.7%).

In 2021, 36.2% of divorcees came from the black African community. In 2020, just 24.3% of divorcees were black African. As a result, divorce rates among black Africans have surged by about 50% over the last decade. Furthermore, Stats SA (2021:6-45) indicated that divorce rates in South Africa climbed from 2018 to 2022. The 2018 divorce data is based on 25,284 completed divorce forms that Stats SA collected and processed at the end of December 2020 (Stats SA 2021:6).

Taking into consideration that 50% of marriages end in divorce, and divorce among the black Africans increased by almost the same percentage (50%) in the last 10 years (Stats SA 2013). According to the Green Paper on Marriages (2021:41), divorces in 2017 increased by 64 (0,3%) to 25 390 from 25 326 cases processed in 2016. The number of divorces increased consistently from 2012 to 2017 and black African couples had the highest number of divorces compared to other population groups (Green Paper on Marriages 2021:41). However, it is crucial to observe and recall that marriage is a much broader phenomena as non-Christians also get married and divorced. (Hulley and Kretzschmar, 2012:71). Therefore, the above statistics might not necessarily refer to Christian community, but the researcher used it as a base for all intentions and purpose of this study.

To demonstrate this even further, although the information relates to the entire society and not necessarily to church-goers, in the Stats SA (2013) divorce data released, which is based on 23 885 completed divorce forms that Stats SA received and processed by the end of December 2014, the following emerged:

- The divorce rate was 0,4 divorces per 1 000 estimated resident population in 2013 (divorce rate refers to the number of divorces per 1 000 persons in the population).
- The number (23 885) indicates that there was an increase of 1 887 (8,6%) divorces from 21 998 cases processed in 2012.

- The divorces generally fluctuated over the period 2003 to 2013, with the highest number observed in 2005 (32 484), and the lowest in 2011 (20 980).
- In 2018, according to Stats SA (2018:37), black African couples had the highest number of divorces in comparison to other groups throughout the ten-year period (2009 to 2018).

Furthermore, divorce records show that couples from the white population dominated the number of divorces from 2003 to 2007, with black African couples having the biggest number of divorces until 2013. In 2003, 40% of divorcees were white, with 24.3% being black African.

In 2013, the divorce rate among Black Africans was 36.2%, while the divorce rate among White people was 31.7%.

From the above statistics information provided by Stats SA (2013 and 2018), it becomes clear that the South African society experiences serious escalating divorce challenges.

2.2 The institution of marriage

Marriage means many things to many people and it has been defined in a plethora of ways. The concept of marriage cannot be pinned to a few phrases because various people attach subjective meaning to it (Zikhali 2009:13). The concept has been around for many years and is understood in many different ways by many cultures and communities. Marriage as an institution is as old as humanity. In the olden days, for both the Shona and Ndebele people of Zimbabwe, for instance, marriage was a cultural institution that every man and woman was expected to respect (Ndlovu and Mangena 2013:474). Mulaudzi (2013:154) opines that before colonisation, education on marriage and family life was part of the African society. Boys and girls undertook community programmes that properly monitored and prepared them for future family living. However, when the communities were colonised, these good practices were discontinued, and such indigenous mentorship programmes were not made part of the school system. Notwithstanding that, Khathide (2000:1) argues that most people in Africa were expected to marry at some stage in adult life. Others married very young

and as youth and young adults. Marriage preparation, therefore, became crucial in order to avoid marital breakups and prevent future marital problems in families (Zikhali 2009:37). It also contributed to strong sustainable marriage relationships. Furthermore, it empowered couples so that they may have effective problem-solving skills that would be useful in the future.

Marriage can be defined and viewed from several different perspectives and contexts, such as religious, legal, and psychological. Matsepe (2017:24) adds that marriage is also viewed differently by different cultures. For example, the manner in which Western culture defines and understands the concept is different from the African view, even though the former has in many ways influenced the latter. In Africa, for example, in KwaZulu-Natal, marriage is known as *ukwenda*. In its literal definition, *ukwenda* means to travel a considerable distance. The voyage, which is metaphorically employed in the context of marriage, consists of cultural ceremonies that integrate a lady into her husband's family. It is widely assumed that a woman in a Zulu household not only marries her husband but also joins his family (Ngubane 1977:8). As a result, in most African communities, marriage is between a man and a woman, as well as their respective families. Hunt (1987:18) defines marriage as the union of a man and a woman who promise and betroth themselves to each other as spouses in the Christian society. It is an institution that connects two people together in a partnership, alliance, or contract in which the parties agree to be devoted to each other. In African Zulu traditional culture, as in many other African cultures, marriage brings the husband and wife's family together. In Western culture, husband and wife families are not as prominent as they are in African traditional culture.

2.2.1 Marriage in African Context

Khathide (2000:1) postulates that most people in Africa were expected to have a family and do what is expected of married people. Most of the African communities' lives were designed in such a way that all functional human persons would get married in one way or the other. Hence, Mbiti (1991:133) posits that "*Marriage and procreation are a unity in African communities; without procreation marriage is incomplete*".

In most African societies marriage was understood as an affair between families and its goal was the preservation of the tribe or family lineage (Kiriswa 2002:84). This is

the reason why procreation and parenting are important values in African families. Besides, big families are viewed as sources of prestige and wealth, although we need to note the other facts: large families are often poorer than others and are unable to send their children to school for many years or to tertiary institutions. In addition, they often do not have many forms of entertainment, which inhibits the academic development of the children. The number of children in such communities is meant to create a labour force for family agricultural projects, etc. (Kiriswa 2002:84).

Perspectives on marriage and its values are shaped by various sources, including family, friends, and the community environment in which individuals are raised (William, 2012:2). Consequently, Mashau (2005:53) suggests that as people mature they come to understand that marriage is the central axis around which all aspects of life revolve, based on their observations of their parents' relationships and those within the extended family. Khathide (2000:1) agrees and adds that for many people marriage is a paradox, since most of those who are not yet married desire to see themselves having marital partners one day and many of those who are in marriage want to get out. The researcher agrees that in marriage cultural principles are observed, respected, and practised (Matiquele, 2019:43). Khathide (2000:1) rightly remarks that:

In whatever way adults look at marriage, the fact remains that most kids dream of the time when they will be married and have their own children. Despite the heartache and pain that marriage has caused to so many, there is still irresistible desire in many people to want to get married.

2.2.2 African culture and extended families

Marriage is seen as a cultural and spiritual reality as well as a human or natural institution (Matiquele, 2019:43). It serves as the cornerstone of a society's social, religious, and economic existence (Mwiti and Dueck, 2006:171).

If Khathide (2000) is correct with what he asserts above, attention will now be provided to what motivates people in societies to want to get married.

In most African traditions, as Khathide (2000:2) points out, people desire to get married, they do so driven by many reasons, some good and honourable and others

bad and dishonourable. Mashau (2005:38–39) points out quite eloquently that some people marry mainly in order to improve their social standing within their tribe and among family members. Rafumbedzani (2001:29), for instance, highlights that in Venda culture, family frequently has a greater influence on marriage than romantic love between partners. A person who marries becomes a member of their spouse's complete family as well. This may cause significant intervention from family members in the marriage, which would influence how the couple makes decisions. Thus, more consideration should be given to the extended family's function.

Involving extended family members in a marriage is a long-standing African tradition. According to Matiquele (2019:44), it is true that African couples who get married have friends and family on both sides of the marriage who help them make decisions and serve as counsellors. Matrimony, as noted by Khathide (2000:32), includes more than just a husband and wife. Baloyi (2014:23) comes to the conclusion that the couple's extended family ought to be given the chance to influence decisions made within their marriage. However, some marital disagreements may stem from incorrect counsel offered by members of the extended family (Matiquele 2019:44). According to Mashau (2005:62), parental and extended family intervention frequently leads to greater conflict rather than problem resolution.

Mashau (2005:55) attests that the spouse should only expressly ask the extended family to get involved when there is a particular need. Instead, he says, couples should be encouraged to seek help from licensed therapists and clergy.

Baloyi (2014:19) concurs with Mashau's perspective, pointing out that family members' intervention may not always be beneficial. He is an advocate of the church teaching its members to stay out of family disputes unless they are specifically invited. In addition, Baloyi (2014:32) makes the point that an unjustified meddling by relatives might be interpreted as an infringement on the dignity and human rights of the couple. Nonetheless, Baloyi admits that, when asked, constructive involvement can assist in resolving marital problems and enhancing bonds within African families (Baloyi, 2014:20-32).

Nevertheless, some members of the extended family could have personal agendas that hinder, rather than aid in, conflict resolution. Despite the fact that family members and their structures have historically assisted in resolving marital issues, it is crucial to understand that they are typically not qualified to provide professional intervention.

The researcher supports the opinions of Baloyi (2014:20–32) and Mashau (2005:55), who contend that young couples should be given the freedom to manage their marriages on their own and that extended families should only step in when required and at the couple's request. Furthermore, the researcher concurs with Gushee (2004:416) that an outside intervention may not be beneficial to the marriage. Therefore, in order to improve their problem-solving skills, African couples are advised to solely consult church employees who have received professional training in marriage counselling.

2.2.3 Childbearing in African marriage

According to Mbiti (1981:42), childbirth is valued so highly in African indigenous thought systems that it is viewed as the main goal and the most significant aspect of marriage. He contends that marriage and having children are inextricably linked in African societies, suggesting that a marriage is considered incomplete in the absence of children (Mbiti 1991:133).

In African countries, children are very important in marriage and the larger community, especially in isolated rural areas (Baloyi 2013b:3). Mbiti (1991:133) further asserts that in many African culture's marriage is synonymous with the production of children, especially boys, to carry on the name of the family in patrilineal societies.

Mbiti presents the traditional African value system regarding marriage, but the situation is changing. Recent publications, for example Kimani (2004), highlight the difficulties caused by the traditional approach. He argues that where procreation defines marriage, frequent sexual intercourse may be enforced, which means that women are abused by being viewed and treated as objects (Kimani 2004:406). As a result, many women in African households end up living virtually as slaves in their own homes.

The general authoritarian and patriarchal nature of African marriages, the roles of husbands and wives in marriage are rigidly defined. This encompasses the belief that women should bear children, cook, clean, and manage household responsibilities, while men are traditionally expected to provide for the family's needs (Mulaudzi 2013:156). This expectation persists even when women's economic status has evolved. According to Matiquele (2019:43), in many African cultures, women prepare, serve, and eat meals in the kitchen with their children. It is uncommon for wives to dine at the same table as their husbands, especially when guests are present. According to Mwiti and Dueck (2006:191; Ruppel, 2008:36-37), she greets visitors but then leaves till the dinner is finished. The researcher believes that traditional beliefs often lead to violations of women's rights. Other than that, the younger ones are socialised in an inappropriate way that perpetuates a vicious cycle of violation of women's rights.

2.2.4 Childlessness in African marriage

As a result of the values explained in 2.2.3, one of the other biggest challenges to an African marriage is infertility or childlessness. Masakona (2000:18) contends that in the thoughts of African societies, the aim of marriage is to have children in order for the couple to demonstrate to society that they are adults in the true and full sense of the term. Consequently, a woman without children is often perceived as youthful and does not receive the same respect as a mother within the community (Mariano 2004:2). Matiquele (2019:45) asserts that bearing children is considered a natural destiny for all women. A childless marriage is typically seen as incomplete, and can even be regarded as embarrassing or abnormal, leading to a husband's dissatisfaction with a wife who cannot "provide him with children" (Baloyi, 2014:22; Masakona, 2000:18; Moyo and Muller, 2011:4-6). Khathide (2000:48) highlights that childlessness often leads to polygamy, as procreation is highly valued in African communities and is considered the primary purpose of marriage on the continent. Chisale (2020:121) agrees:

[I]f a husband is dissatisfied with his wife, who may fail to provide him with heirs (male children), because the woman is barren, or because the husband no longer loves the wife, which are all reasons for couples to divorce, the traditional Ndebele culture in Zimbabwe allows the husband to have a polygamous marriage.

Furthermore, Rafumbedzani (2001:28-30) argues that traditional African marriage strongly emphasizes procreation and multiplication, which serve to increase the number of family or clan members. Consequently, a couple that do not have children is seen as failing to contribute to the continuation of the family name and the community. As a result, if their first wife is unable to bear children, many African males seek out new brides. If they are in a childless marriage, some may even indulge in extramarital affairs to demonstrate their virility and manhood (Kimani, 2004:406; Mashau, 2006:52).

The researcher agrees with Khathide (2000:48), who notes that childlessness places a significant, if not unacceptable, strain on a marriage. Some people believe that a couple's inability to have children is a curse from God for the wrongs they or their ancestors have committed. Traditional Venda people, for example, regard infertility as unnatural (Rafumbedzani 2001:55). Childlessness is therefore regarded as a curse among African women in some, but not all, contexts (Mashau 2016a:95). Mashau (2016a:95) further indicates that African women are treated as “gardens to be cultivated to bear fruit” and that “bearing fruit” is determined primarily by a woman giving birth. This need to be emphasized in this era because of the perception created by other men who think that a woman is like a garden that is only useful when it comes to childbearing. A childless woman in Africa suffers more than a sterile man, according to Mariono (2004:1). When she is diagnosed with infertility, she frequently feels angry, guilty, and depressed.

In a society that places such a high importance on children, a childless couple finds it difficult to maintain their marriage (Rafumbedzani, 2001:30). The couple may experience feelings of fear, alienation, and loneliness, particularly on occasions where other couples celebrate the birth of their children (Mwiti and Dueck, 2006:194). In addition, husband and wife may sometimes start to accuse one another for being childless (Baloyi 2013b:6). However, Khathide (2000) points out that the wife is not necessarily the cause of the couple's infertility; the problem could also lie with the husband. Khathide (2000:48) also shows that in some cases, in Scripture, spiritual intervention helped to reverse infertility, for example in the cases of Sarah (Gen. 18), Hannah (1 Sam. 1) and Elizabeth (Lk. 1). It is the opinion of this researcher that it is the Church's responsibility to organize marital counselling sessions to help couples

understand that it is God who blesses marriages with children (Moyo and Miller 2011:6). This matter is addressed in Chapter 6 (see 6.8).

2.2.5 Wife Submission

Another obstacle in marriage is the topic of power and control, particularly the belief that a wife must be obedient to the husband. Mashau (2016a:39) accurately describes a woman's submission to her husband as a "thorny" topic in African marriages. In the African culture, a woman is not treated equally with her husband (Matequele 2019:47). According to Mashau (2016a:99), in an African marriage, the husband is entrusted with leadership: *Monna ke tlhogo ya lelapa* ("The man is the head of the family"). Matequele (2019:47) contends that the traditional African view of the man as the head of the marriage makes achieving deep emotional unity between husband and wife practically unattainable. According to Mashau (2016a:99-100), this is an area where some African men fail dismally:

They want to give orders and become bosses to their wives. They do so without trying to communicate and hear what they wives' opinion are. They take unilateral decisions like dictators. Their women are relegated to inferior beings, or they are treated the same way as children in the family.

This issue leads to women being humiliated and oppressed. The issue of oppression in African marriages is fairly widespread (Gillham 2012:95). Tembe (2010:84) contends that in order to address marital troubles, African traditions emphasize male dominance in whatever they do. This causes the woman to be disrespected and promotes gender-based violence. According to Osinaike (2012:4), husbands frequently humiliate their women, justifying it as part of their tradition and customs. This is supported by Malinga (1997:8), who reports one man as saying, "In African society, my wife is not my equal. She is my property. She's like one of my children. I've paid *lobola* for her. Therefore, we cannot be equals."

African women within Christian African marriages are not exempt from experiences of domestic violence in their homes (Phiri 2000:85-100). This is because the patriarchal structures of African culture are reinforced by the patriarchy of the Bible (Phiri 2002:20). Kanyoro (1996:5) has rightly argued that:

Culture has been the primary focus of African women's theology. Culture has silenced many African women, preventing us from experiencing God's freeing promises. Positive components of our culture that improve the well-being of women have been hidden. Those that demean women are still practiced to varying degrees in our communities, frequently making women objects of cultural preservation.

The researcher agrees with Phiri (2002) and Kanyoro (1996); unfortunately, African cultural beliefs have made African women stay in abusive relationships and experience sexual violence in their homes. According to Phiri (2002:24), sex is utilized as a tool of domination, and it is thought that married women should not reject their husband's sexual advances. Mashau (2006:39) candidly states that often males in many African societies marry largely for sex and, as a result, see their women as little more than objects of sex. According to Matiquele (2019:38), extramarital or premarital sex is not seen as immoral or improper unless the woman is married or the act was not planned in advance, in which case it is not regarded as problematic. Chisale (2016:62) goes on to say that a husband's infidelity should not be questioned because men are traditionally and socially allowed to have more than one wife. *Indoda yinja* ("A man is a dog") is an African proverb that indicates a man, like a dog, cannot be held down to one sexual partner; thus, the wife should not be surprised if her husband has other sexual relationships (Chisale 2016:62).

Sexual violence is caused by patriarchy, which has turned violence into a power game (Phiri 2002:19). According to Njoroge (1997:81), patriarchy is a negative force characterized by systemic and normative inequalities. It also has an impact on the subsequent stages of creation. Njoroge (1997:81) adds that its origins are deeply ingrained in both society and the church, suggesting that in order to resist patriarchy, we need men and women who are dedicated and well-equipped. For the sake of women's welfare, any African culture that upholds male dominance, gender inequality, and female enslavement ought to be re-examined (Baloyi 2014:29). There are disparities in authority between men and women in African churches and communities. Phiri (2002:24–25) claims that the fact that males are often older and more educated than women in marriages exacerbates the power disparity.

2.2.6 Marriage as a Divine Intervention (Blessing)

Marriage is God's idea. Khathide (2000:16) observes that in many cultures and communities, marriage remains the basic unit in societal life. He further states that when marriage started, it was established on the foundation of God's blessing. The creation account in Genesis 1:27-28 reads:

So God created humans, shaping them to be like himself. He made them male and female, blessed them, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves on the earth. (Khathide, 2000:57).

Genesis 2:22-23, as quoted by Eyrich (1978:3), also confirms that marriage is a divine institution, which is also divinely delineated. According to God, it is a divine institution because God originated it and officiated at the first "marriage ceremony" in the Garden of Eden. Not only did God establish the pattern, God also prescribed the ground rules. In the book of Proverbs (2:17) and Malachi (2:14), God speaks of the marriage relationship as a covenant.

Marriage is also a gift from God, and Foster (1985:135) asserts that it is a gift to be received reverently and to be nurtured tenderly. If marriage is a gift of God, Khathide (2000:51) argues that it may therefore not be disrespected by anyone. He points to Hebrews 13:4, which reminds us that marriage is to be honoured by all, and that husband and wife must be faithful to each other, since God will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery.

Matsepe (2017:25) goes on to say that marriage serves as a tool of establishing and maintaining communities. It is a relationship in which the parties share the same legal obligations and responsibilities. Marriages create families and are widely regarded as the stabilizing foundation for responsible procreation (Post 2000:53). Marriage connects two people through a wide range of experiences. According to Napier (2000:78), it is a process in which married partners learn to be separate while also being together, to allocate power, to pool their financial and emotional resources, to shape a sexual life, to share intimate as well as mundane feelings, and, most importantly, to rear another generation. Furthermore, Stanley (1997:103) asserts that marriage can be viewed as a long-term investment, both emotionally and financially,

and that it functions in many respects like one. Marriage transforms people's lives. Each committed partner gains new status and responsibilities as husband and wife.

To maintain their marriage ties, married couples must make daily investments and sacrifices. Commitment to a marriage partnership is essential for managing the shift from detaching sufficiently from each of their original families to forming a new cohesive marital unit (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 2000:69). According to Loewen (1980:76), its cohesiveness stems from comradeship rather than responsibility and social pressure, as in the more typical institutional family.

Therefore, marriage can be defined and viewed from a number of different perspectives and contexts, including religious, legal, and psychological. From the religious point of view, marriage can be viewed as a sacred institution instituted by God and should be cherished as such. Marriage can be seen as the most intimate of all relationships: physically, psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally (Zikhali 2009:5). Khathide (2000:57) postulates that marriage is a mystery because it brings two people of different genders and backgrounds to become one and to live together as a functional unity. It is important to highlight that the concept of marriage, as defined, was strictly within the context of Christianity. This perspective did not acknowledge same-sex unions or diverse sexual identities and gender minorities, which were legally prohibited in South Africa until recently. Sexual relations between persons of the same sex were characterised as deviant and criminal behaviour before 1994.

After 1994, with the abolition of apartheid and the establishment of a new constitutional dispensation based on the values of equality, human dignity and freedom, discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals and communities was officially relegated to the past. The researcher acknowledges that even if we may not subscribe to that, as researchers this is the reality with which we are confronted. However, for the purpose of this study, marriage refers to a union exclusively between a man and a woman, without denying the reality, constitutionality, and legality of same-sex unions, since they are legislated in the South African context.

2.2.7 The mystery of marriage

In the Genesis account we are told that the bond of marriage is greater even than the bond of a child to a parent. That is why Khathide (2000:57) views marriage as a mystery of unity. First, from the religious perspective from which the research will be carried out, marriage is viewed as an institution designed by God and therefore its pattern is found in the Bible. Second, in order to understand that the marrying partners must have a proper relation with God who is the designer and originator. Third, the established Christian practice, aligned with the traditional understanding of God's plan, endorses heterosexual relationships. Within the context of this research, marriage is defined as a union between a man and a woman of opposite sexes, male and female. Finally, Christian marriage is supposed to be a monogamous union (Khathide 2000:31; Mashau 2016a:16).

There are a number of passages from the Bible that deal with marriage. However, the key scriptural passage is Genesis 2:18-25, which would be supported by many, and the following section clarifies the fundamental truth about marriage. Mashau (2016a:13-22) gives an explanation for the Biblical foundation of marriage, according to Matsepe (2017:27-29).

To argue the case, more texts will be used to support the notion of marriage as a holy institution.

2.3 Marriage as a holy institution

Kiriswa (2002:84) argues that, according to the Christian teaching, marriage is a holy institution, a life commitment, a vocation, and a covenant of love between husband and wife, ordained by God for companionship, mutual love, support, procreation, and the education of children. Even though others, such as the Roman Catholic tradition, regard marriage as a sacrament, it is not regarded as a sacrament in the Reformed tradition, from which this research is conducted. Mashau (2016a:13) agrees with Kiriswa (2002) and points out that according to Genesis (1:27-28 and 2:22), we are reminded of the fundamental truth that God instituted marriage in the beginning. God created a human being as the crown of God's creation on the sixth day and, after having created a human being, God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone

(Genesis 2:18). God then made a woman as a partner for him and “married” the two of them. God therefore personally united the first couple and gave them a pastoral blessing. Marriage should therefore be seen as a gift from God and can be regarded as the most intimate of all relationships: physically, psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally. Indeed, Khathide (2000:56) concludes that marriage is a gift to be handled in honour of the One who instituted it. As the union is formed by God and couples do not journey the marital stages alone, God is its invisible central point (Trokan 1998:176).

2.4 Marriage as a God-given institution

After having created human beings as male and female, God blessed the two to become one, for better and for worse (Genesis 1:31). Therefore, the institution of marriage was without any blemish. God’s original plan and purpose of marriage was to unite two people in order for them to be “one flesh”. In his interpretation of Hebrews 13:4, Khathide (2000:56) rightly remarks that marriage is highly esteemed by God and any immoral behaviour by those who are married is considered a violation of the “one-fleshness” intended by God. Marriage is therefore God-given and not merely a cultural custom or human institution. When men and women marry, they form a family with the purpose of bringing children into the world. This follows the blessing God bestowed upon Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, commanding them to reproduce, populate, and tame the world (Genesis 1:28). Marriage as a God-given institution should, therefore, be a union of two people.

2.5 Marriage as a union of two people

Marriage, as confirmed by Mashau (2016a:15), is meant for two people. He acknowledges, however, that among young people today there are those who have become lesbians and gays. But if the truth is to be told, there are those who are not young but old who are gays and lesbians. Gays and lesbians have not become but they have always been gay and lesbian. They claim, rightly or wrongly, that they are born that way. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, marriage is viewed as the union of a man and a woman. God created a woman for the man, a suitable companion, a “helpmate” specifically designed to be complementary (Mashau

2016a:15). Khathide (2000:53) suggests that the most obvious purpose envisioned by God in establishing marriage was the propagation of the human race. God's first command to the couple in Eden was: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). Therefore, within the marriage relationship, God carries out his further creative process in fellowship with human beings.

2.6 Christian marriage as a monogamous union

Mashau (2016a:16) aligns with Khathide (2000:31) that in the beginning, God created a male and a female which could be viewed as a typical example that a truly Christian marriage is monogamous. It is also noted in Genesis 2:25 that the two who get married shall become one flesh and should not be separated until death. Monogamy is therefore the form of marriage which meets the Biblical norm (Olthuis 1976:64).

In Genesis 2:24 it is stated: "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh". Marriage, as viewed by Trobisch (1971:12), is a tent with three pillars and as a result introduces three very critical concepts, namely leave, cleave and oneness. Van der Walt (1994:409) confirms these three words as the profound secret or mystery of marriage. They are explained as follows.

2.6.1 Leaving – "The wedlock corner"

Leaving, according to Trobisch (1971:12), indicates that a public and legal act has to take place in order to make a marriage a marriage. It entails that the two should physically move from their parents' homes to go and live together in their own house (Mashau 2016a:17). This is how a new independent societal relationship comes into being, through two members of two different families living together in their own house (Van der Walt 1994:409). This is a mystery, which Khathide (2000:57) calls a mystery of unity as it ushers us into the strange and awesome mystery of "one-flesh" in all its fullness. Khathide (2000) further postulates that marriage is also a blessing. Despite all its challenges and pressures, we need to affirm the blessedness of marriage because when marriage started, it was established on the foundation of God's blessing.

The public performance attests to the fact that marriage is never a private affair. It is a communal affair in an African context. It is part of a network of relationships in a community. It is a communal affair that involves families of the two engaged partners. Marriage should be solemnised in the presence of God and the Church. Leaving is therefore the “wedlock corner” in which God blesses the two in the presence of the congregation (Mashau 2016b:17).

2.6.2 Cleaving – “The love corner”

Leaving and cleaving are words that belong together, according to Mashau (2016b:19). Leaving describes the more public and legal aspects, while cleaving is the “love corner” in which the couple are emotionally bonded to each other. Explicating cleaving, Trobisch (1971:15) remarks that it means love of a special kind; it has made a decision to no longer be searching and seeking for love. The love that cleaves is mature; it has decided to remain faithful to one person for life. It indicates strong love or commitment or unbreakable truth. It means reliability, genuineness, honesty, integrity, and fidelity. It involves loyalty, trust, love, devotion, reliability: a husband can count on his wife, and she on him (Mashau 2016b:17). Closely linked to the above two concepts is oneness.

2.6.3 Oneness “corner”

Oneness entails the most intimate union between the two. It is only in this corner that the two can enjoy sexual intercourse as the most intimate physical relationship between man and woman (Mashau 2016b:20). Consequently, God intended for sex to only be enjoyed in the union of marriage. The apostle Paul realised the possession of such sexual desires as one of the divine reasons for which God instituted marriage. In 1 Corinthians 7:2, the apostle commanded: “Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband”. Without marriage, “there would be free mating which would reduce human beings created in the image of God to a beastly level” (Kimathi 1994:44).

Thus, marriage is a lifetime commitment made by a husband and wife, whereby they both decide to live independently of their parents and create their own nuclear family. From the husband and wife’s perspective, it should be seen as a holy matrimony or covenant representing the closest bond possible and a divine gift. Most Christians view

it as a partnership of love, made richer and deeper through sex, and regard it as the best context for nurturing children.

However, it transcends the mere definition of those who are participants and those who try to define it according to their personal experience (Glendon 1999:140). In the words of Mbiti (1991:133), quoted already, “marriage and procreation are a unity in African communities; without procreation marriage is incomplete”.

It is within marriage that husband and wife produce offspring. Even though a husband and wife establish their own nuclear family, Mbiti (1991:133) cautions that in African communities, marriage does not only involve two people. He describes it as a complex affair with economic, social, and religious dimensions that frequently overlap and cannot be separated. Marriage is central to African culture. It is the gathering place for all members of a community, including the deceased, the living, and those who have yet to be born. Mbiti (1991:133) maintains that

... all the dimensions of time come together there, and the entire play is repeated, regenerated, and reinvigorated. Marriage is a drama in which everyone participates as an actor or actress rather than simply watching. Marriage is thus a duty, a requirement of corporate society, and a way of life in which everyone must participate.

Marriage was therefore regarded as a process with important steps of courtship, socially approved agreements and finally the ceremonies and establishment of a conjugal relationship with rights and obligation (Waruta and Kinoti 2000:100). They also claim that the marriage contract not only gave marriage a sense of seriousness and dignity, but also signalled the transfer of marital rights over his wife as well as parental rights over any children she would have.

Marriage was in general considered to be a lifelong union, even though it could be dissolved, and divorces were generally not as common as they are today. Once a couple were married, it was very difficult to separate or divorce. The only major ground to justify divorce included cruelty, charges of sorcery, incompatibility, adultery and, in some cases, childlessness. Such a divorce process was vigorous and included scrutiny by elders, and it was not easily approved (Waruta and Kinoti 2000:105). Where there was barrenness, there were means and ways around it. For instance, if

it was from the wife, the husband would rather take another wife than to divorce his wife. Therefore, the marriage institution in Africa has always been considered as normal, natural, and fully expected. Everyone was expected to marry after initiation, as their sacred duty to their family and clan, in order to raise children and carry on their name, and that of the family (Khathide 2000:32). In an African context the oneness of the two partners does not exclude the communal nature of marriage, which involves families on both sides. Marriage for example the Ndebele of Matetsi in Zimbabwe, is a spiritual practice and they believe it is ordained by God and the ancestors (Chisale, 2020:109). African spiritual marriage concerns and customary marriage rites are discussed in sections 2.7 and 2.8.

2.7 Significance of traditional marriage rituals

Marriage is an important milestone for the Ndebele since it represents adulthood and independence from both the male and the woman's parents (Chisale 2020:115). Mbiti (1969:133) confirms this, claiming that marriage in Africa is existential, a drama, a responsibility, a demand, and a rhythm in which everyone must participate under normal conditions or suffer social marginalization and rejection.

The Ndebele of Matetsi's traditional marriage ceremonies connect the bride to her husband's ancestors and are utilized to secure their acceptance for the relationship (Chisale 2020:116). The conduct of these ceremonies demonstrates that marriage is a life-or-death relationship between the bride, groom, and his ancestors (Chisale 2020). Some couples prefer to bypass the traditional rites and simply participate in the Christian portion of the marriage ceremony; for these couples, their spiritual link to the husband's ancestors is unknown because they were not properly introduced to the family's ancestry (Chisale 2020:117).

Chisale (2020:110) describes two kinds of marriage celebrations observed by the Ndebele of Matetsi. Chisale (2020) explains that traditional spiritual weddings involve procedures that introduce the bride to her husband's ancestors, legalizing the union. A Western 'white wedding' involves signing marital documents in front of a licensed marriage officer to legally bind the couple. Both ceremonies recognize the importance

of Chisale (2020) in the Matetsi society, with the former having greater spiritual significance. Dreyer (2011:np) provides the following description:

... spirituality is central to a person's life and defines what is meaningful to them. This essential meaning is linked to self-perception (how I see myself). Self-perception is related to life orientation (where I am in the world), which is linked to one's identity.

2.8 African marriage spirituality and ancestors

The Matetsi people of Zimbabwe marry according to a patriarchal spiritual tradition (Chisale, 2020:109). African spirituality, according to Chisale (2020:110), includes belief systems, symbols, rituals, festivals, folktales, music, dance, and culture. It also includes Africa's historical, cultural, traditional, political, economic, and religious heritage. Spiritualisation is the expression of spiritual traits and attributes in which the spiritual (soul and spirit) aspect takes precedence over the physical (material) part (Chisale 2020:110). Masango (2006:942) also emphasizes the holistic nature of African spirituality, stating that it is reflected at all levels of society. According to Chisale (2020:110), marriage is a sacred spiritual rite among the Nguni, particularly the traditional Ndebele of Matetsi in Zimbabwe. The spiritual aspect of African marriage involves lobola, or bride price payment, as well as marriage rites and rituals, which are a time-consuming procedure among Zimbabwe's Ndebele. Ndlovu and Mangena (2013:473) agree, adding that among the Ndebele and Shona groups, marriage entails the bridegroom paying the bride price (known as *lobola* and *roora*, respectively) to the bride's family. Any marriage that does not include the payment of the bride price “looks like casual sex or prostitution” (Ndlovu and Mangena, 2013:473). In some ways, assigning a value to the woman was a method of conferring prestige. The bride price value outweighed the future son-in-law's outward demonstration of thanks; it often compensated for the loss of a producing daughter (Ndlovu and Mangena 2013:473). According to Chisale (2020), the lobola process begins with the man's family sending a messenger/go-between (*umkhongi* or *idombo*) to the woman's family, followed by marriage talks, and finally by marriage rituals/rites. According to Ndlovu and Mangena (2013:473), *lobola* has both emotional and spiritual meanings because it strengthens the bonds between children and their maternal ancestors through, for example, the payment of *inkomo yohlanga* (a cow given to the wife's mother). In Shona culture, this cow is known as *mombe yeumai*. According to Ndlovu

and Mangena (2013), the following are three reasons for lobola in traditional Ndebele societies:

- *Kuyisibongo somkhwenyana ethakazelela imuli aselayo ngenxa yabakwabozala.* (It is a thank you from the son in law appreciating the family that he now has courtesy of the in-laws);
- *Kulobugugu bakho kunxa zonke zobudlelwano. Kothethweyo lasebazalini bakhe yisibonakaliso sonthado, kwenza indoda igamthathi kalula umkayo.* (It is precious to both sides of the relationship. It is a sign of love to the wife and her parents; it ensures that the husband respects his wife);
- *Kufaka abantwana emasikweni abogogo bakanina bangena emasikweni lawo ngenkomo yohlanga (inkomo yamalobolo ephiwa unina wentombi).* (It puts the children in the ways of their mother's grandmothers. They get into these customs through a cow given to the mother of the wife).

From the above, the significance of paying *lobola/roora* for both the Shona and the Ndebele had.

Chisale (2020:110) states that when a woman has participated in marriage rites, society considers her to be linked to her husband's ancestors and that she must be true to them until the day she dies, or as they would describe it until she "crosses to the other side". Zulu (1998:183) defines ancestors as those who have died but continue to exist in the world of the dead. This spiritual link to the husband's ancestors is both fascinating and, at times, terrifying for the wife, the latter due to fear of the unknown (Chisale 2020:110). Furthermore, according to Chisale (2020), traditional marriage binds the woman spiritually and emotionally to her matrimonial ancestors among the Ndebele of Matetsi. Once the lobola has been paid a woman leaves her family and ancestors and joins her husband's family and ancestors. According to Chisale (2020:117), she also migrates from her family church and joins her husband's church. In emphasising the significance of rituals for Africans, Oduyoye (2004:79) argues that:

In African religion, rites of passage play an important part. An individual's progress through life is observed, marked, and celebrated from before birth to death and beyond, and the events in a community's life mirror this cycle. Several rituals can be observed throughout one's life.

Marriage is an important ceremony for Africans since it increases the number of ancestors (Oduyoye 2004:80). A wife who joins her husband's family expands the pool of ancestors by bearing boys, ensuring the "return" of ancestors through reincarnation, because sons marry and have offspring in turn (Chisale 2020:118). However, Chisale (2020:112) contends that the internalised religio-cultural oppression and wife abuse caused by the spiritualisation of African traditional marriage imprisons wives; they cannot even escape the abuse they face through divorce because they are said to be spiritually connected to their husband's ancestors for life. Chisale (2020:120) argues that while the spiritualization of African marriage is not inherently problematic, the resulting issue of wife abuse is certainly a significant concern.

2.9 Wife abuse and consequences of spiritualisation

The Shona and Ndebele saw lobola/roora as a great tradition. According to Ndlovu and Mangena (2013:474), it was the initial step and a cultural need for establishing each household. However, Ndlovu and Mangena (2013) suggest that the payment of lobola/roora is one of the many ways in which patriarchy asserts dominance over women. In most situations, men have authority over the procedures, which is an important aspect of gender relations in patriarchies (Ndlovu and Mangena 2013:474). This is supported by Chisale (2016:55-69), who contends that in some African marriages, emotional violence is informed by patriarchal definitions of marriage that require a wife to honour and submit to her husband. Dreyer (2011:2) agrees and adds that patriarchy teaches women to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, and in doing so, they fade into the background. Chisale (2020:119) agrees that spiritualisation of marriage makes it difficult to combat wife abuse. Marriage ceremonies have implications when a woman is abused by her husband, because she lacks the authority to cancel the marriage without inviting the ancestors and extended families back to the drafting board (Chisale 2020:118). Chisale (2020:120) mentions the following consequences of the fact that there are no rituals for divorce among the traditional Ndebele of Matetsi and of marriage as a lifetime union between two families:

- Some women would rather die in an abusive marriage, while waiting for her husband to release her from his ancestors, than to leave without being released;

- Some women in Matetsi seem to be trapped in loveless and abuse marriages;
- Some are imprisoned in abusive marriages, and some are infected with HIV by their husbands, but are still trapped in that relationship because of spirituality;
- If a husband is not satisfied with his wife (for failing to give him heirs (male children) or because he no longer loves her -- the reasons that usually cause couples to separate -- the traditional Ndebele culture in Zimbabwe allows the husband to have a polygamous marriage (Chisale 2020:120).

The challenges faced in matrimony require that both husband and wife should willingly submit to counselling.

2.10 Counselling

Today, the area of therapy is vast and diversified. Counselling has various definitions, which vary by author and textbook. It is frequently misinterpreted (as simply having a chat with a client) or its talents are undervalued (as if no specific skills are required and anyone can counsel, even if they have very little training) (Da Rocha Kustner *et al.* 2008:16). Counselling is defined as “a relationship between two persons in which one person (the counsellor) seeks to advise, encourage, and/or assist another person or persons (the counselee) to deal more effectively with the problem of life” by Christian psychologist Gary Collins (1972:13). He adds, “Unlike psychotherapy, counselling rarely aims to radically alter or remould personality” (Collins 1972:14).

The Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson and Weiner 1989:98) defines counselling as:

Giving or taking of counsel, advising; to giving of advice on personal, social, psychological, etc., problems as an occupation (in psychology) a form of psychotherapy in which the counsellor adopts a permissive and supportive role in enabling a client to solve his or her own problem.

Waruta and Kinoti (2000:2) define counselling as the art and skill of assisting individuals and groups to better understand themselves and relate to one another in a mature and healthy manner. It is the art and talent of allowing others to live hopefully, given that none of us can rely solely on ourselves and exist without the assistance of others. Counselling tries to improve people's attitudes, behaviours, thoughts, and feelings (Kiriswa 2002:1). Counselling helps people through more than just a crisis or

serious problems; it is any intervention that allows an individual to find and build their psychological or relational well-being via the use of psychological interviews, procedures, and testing tools. (Zikhali 2000:24). Counselling is also understood as a dialogue whose aim is to help someone listen more attentively to themselves and to explore, clarify or discover alternative ways of dealing with a problem at hand. It is carried out through a series of encounters and self-disclosures between the person seeking help (counselee) and the helper (counsellor) (Kiriswa 2002:2). Counselling and psychotherapy are sometimes used interchangeably but it is better to view counselling as the comprehensive term and psychotherapy as a highly specialised form of counselling, since it deals with deeper problems and seeks to significantly change personality.

Norcross (1990:218) defines psychotherapy as the informed and intentional use of clinical methods and interpersonal stances based on established psychological principles to assist people in changing their behaviours, cognitions, emotions, and/or other personal characteristics in ways that the participants find desirable. In addition, Sommers-Flanagan, and Sommers-Flanagan (2004:9) define it:

... as the process that entails a trained person applying scientifically established concepts to form professional helping connections with individuals seeking aid in resolving significant or small psychological or relational problems. This is performed by ethically defined means, which include some type of learning or human development.

As a result, throughout our arduous journey through life, we rely on others as much as they rely on us (Waruta and Kinoti 2000:1). However, Da Rocha Kuster *et al.* (2008:91) contend that, while counselling is not a solution for a physical ailment, it can benefit those who are living with or suffering from one. When people are going through difficult times in their lives, Da Rocha Kuster *et al.* (2008:102) recommend that they seek aid from another person. This could be a trustworthy friend, family member, or religious figure. They could also consult with someone who has been trained to assist them more efficiently. The primary goal of counselling is to provide an emotionally safe environment and an accepting, loving connection in which the client can explore, find, and clarify methods to live more satisfyingly and resourcefully (Da Rocha Kustner *et al.* 2008:105). Throughout the counselling process, the client is responsible for their own growth and progress. Essentially, it is about assisting people in helping

themselves and allowing them to flourish in whichever way they choose (Da Rocha Kustner *et al.* 2008:105).

From a user-centred and socially oriented understanding, McLeod (2008:15) adds that counselling can be viewed as a relationship that is initiated when someone who is troubled (a client) has an intent or wish and enters into a particular kind of relationship with a counsellor:

The client does this when they confront a living situation that they have been unable to resolve using their normal means, resulting in their exclusion from some aspect of full participation in social activities.

At this juncture, it is important to delve deeper into counselling.

2.10.1 What then is counselling?

Counselling is the skilful and principled use of a relationship to promote self-awareness, emotional acceptance and growth, and the optimal development of personal resources (Zikhali 2000:35). According to Lartey (2003:82), the overarching goal is to create opportunities to work toward a more meaningful and resourceful lifestyle. Collins (1972:15), on the other hand, sees counselling as an endeavour to provide support and assistance to persons who are experiencing losses, decisions, or disappointments. It also promotes personality growth and development.

Counselling, as stated by Zikhali (2000:25), is viewed as having the following principles:

a. Self-knowledge and determination

Counselling respects the client's self-knowledge and self-determination and does not assume that counsellors have exclusive access to or the authority to interpret a client's complicated inner life.

b. Client's goals to be respected

Counselling respects a client's goals, which may require immediate "symptom-removal" in a short amount of time. This cannot be considered an illegitimate or inefficient purpose.

c. Non-medical enterprise

Counselling is a non-medical profession that believes in the power of nonjudgmental, attentive listening, as well as an ethic of helping and empowering people from all backgrounds.

d. Is a skill

Counselling is a skill and not an elitist activity.

e. Complexity of individuals

Counselling acknowledges the complexity of individuals, the diversity of theories of human behaviour, and the value of a pragmatic, as well as an idealistic attitude.

McLeod (2008:8) postulates that it is through counselling that the counsellor provides the client with time and space that have the following characteristics, which are often not readily available in everyday life):

a. Permission to speak

Clients are encouraged to relate their story and give voice to previously silenced portions of their experience, including emotional expressiveness.

b. Respect for difference

The counsellor sets aside, to the greatest extent possible, their own viewpoint on the issues raised by the client, as well as their own needs at the time, in order to assist the client in articulating and acting on their personal beliefs and aspirations.

c. Confidentiality

Whatever is said is kept confidential, and the counsellor does not disclose what they have learnt from the client to anybody else.

d. Affirmation

The counsellor establishes an affirmative relationship that expresses a set of essential values, including honesty, integrity, compassion, confidence in people's worth and value, commitment to discussion and collaboration, reflexivity, interdependence, and a sense of the common good.

Chiboola (2019:1), on the other hand, provides an African perspective on therapy. He claims that traditional counselling takes a broad perspective that promotes learning for transformation and integration of social and cultural values unique to each human community. According to Chiboola (2019:2), the term "traditional" refers to African

people's initial experience of the sacred, as well as the concrete embodiment of that experience within various ecological and socio-historical contexts. Being traditional does not imply being static or immutable; rather, in the original sense of the phrase, it signifies that cultural habits and practices are passed down from generation to generation (Chiboola 2019:3). Tradition and culture are indigenous entities; they are dynamic and constantly changing. Furthermore, Chiboola (2019:3) believes that traditional counselling has always been a part of the fabric of all human cultures and societies, existing in the midst of peoples and communities all over the world since time immemorial. Chiboola (2019:3) also states that the traditional counselling procedure often consists of four components: the traditional counsellor, the client, the family, and the community.

This means that in order for traditional counselling to work, there must be effective communication between the counsellor to the client, but the traditional counsellor should also be conscious of the sociocultural context of the client, their family and environment (Chiboola 2019:4).

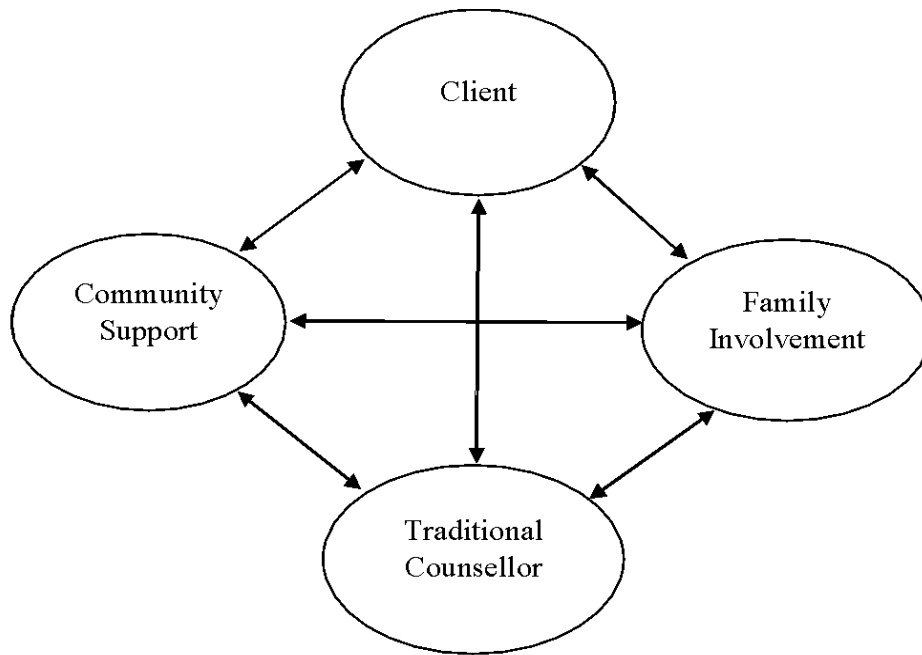


Figure 2: The elements of traditional counselling

Source: Chiboola (2019)

Communication links all of the pieces together so that they can function properly. Communication is a key point of interaction between the traditional counsellor and the client, a means of exchanging information between them, a means of social interaction between the family, community, and the client-counsellor context, and a catalyst for interconnectedness, linkages, and interrelationships among the various elements in the traditional counselling process (Chiboola 2019:4). The emphasis is on collectivism rather than individualism, as well as collaborative ties among the individual client, their family, and the community. From an African perspective, the collectivist orientation strengthens sociocultural links, fosters more coherent problem-solving pathways, and encourages desirable behavioural change for the common welfare of society.

McLeod (2008:13) concludes that the client and counsellor use whatever cultural resources are available, such as conversations, ideas, theories, altered states of consciousness, problem-solving algorithms, discourses, and technologies, to successfully resolve the initial client problem. Furthermore, the potential outcomes of counselling fall into three broad categories, namely (McLeod 2008:14):

- a. Resolution of the original problem in living

This may entail gaining and comprehending a viewpoint on the problem, coming to a personal acceptance of the problem or dilemma, and taking action to address the situation in which it developed.

b. Learning

Counselling can help people gain new insights, skills, and strategies that will help them deal with similar situations in the future.

c. Social inclusion

Counselling boosts a person's vitality and capacity to contribute to the well-being of others and the greater good.

Chiboola (2019:4), on the other hand, believes that knowing the sociocultural context of a client's behaviour and belief system is a necessary psychological component for effective assessment, amelioration, and treatment of client-presented problems. In addition, the important features of traditional counselling from an African perspective are cultural backdrop, belief system, and initiation ceremonies (Figure 3).

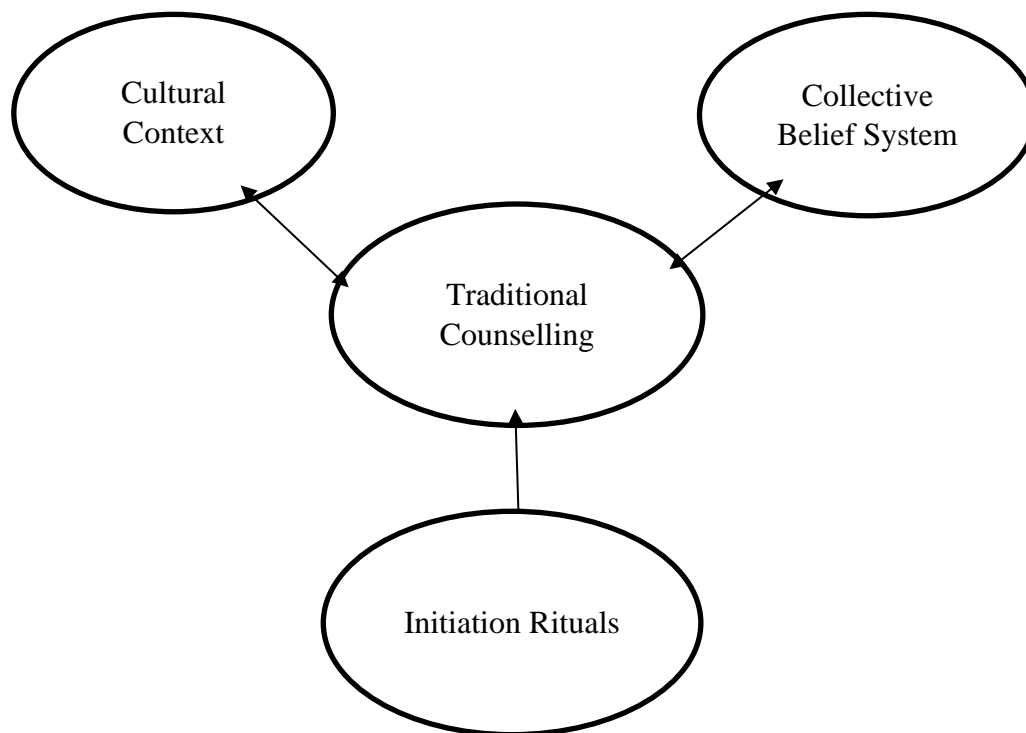


Figure 3: Key elements of traditional counselling from an African perspective

Source: Chiboola (2019)

2.10.2 Cultural context

The term “culture” refers to a society's shared values and beliefs, including individualism, collectivism, herbalism, ritualism, equality, freedom, peace, historical background, and evolution, as well as the arts, customs, and civilization of a specific time or place. (Chiboola 2019:5).

2.10.3 Collective belief system

Values and beliefs serve as the foundation for a person's successful personal existence (age, geographical location, generation). They are shaped by social models and personal experiences (cultural, professional, societal), and they represent essential or universal paradigms like autonomy, equality, liberty, solidarity, freedom, justice, and fairness (Chiboola 2019:6).

2.10.4 Initiation rituals

A rite is a major deed (or a series of rites) that is conducted in accordance with established societal laws and customs. Ritual performance is based on a deeper understanding or requires a significant level of indigenous knowledge, social skills, and competency. Initiation is a specified series of rites used to begin a new phase of life that includes transformation, advancement, and maturation (Chiboola 2019:21).

From a different point of view and in agreement, McLeod (2008:12) provides an overview of a variety of ideas that are common to counselling:

- a. Insight into the origins and development of emotional difficulties;
- b. Relating with others in order to be better able to form meaningful and satisfying relationships;
- c. Self-awareness of thoughts and feeling, or develop a more accurately sense of how self is perceived by others;
- d. Self-acceptance and positive sense of self;
- e. Self-actualisation or individuation, fulfilling one's potential or integrating previously conflicting parts of self;
- f. A state of higher personal or spiritual awareness;
- g. Problem-solving;
- h. Psychological education to understand and control behaviour more positively;

- i. Acquisition of social and interpersonal skills, like anger management and assertiveness;
- j. Cognitive change of irrational beliefs or maladaptive thought patterns;
- k. Behaviour change of maladaptive or self-destructive patterns of behaviour;
- l. Introducing systematic change to social systems, like parents, families, work teams or neighbourhoods;
- m. Empowerment via skills, awareness or knowledge;
- n. Restitution and making amends; and
- o. Generativity in the sense of caring for others; and social action that contributes to the collective good through communal engagement and community work. This could also include activism, advocacy, or political engagement.

The researcher agrees with the views expressed by both Chiboola (2018) and McLeod (2008), even though they are from different schools of thought. Therefore, in summary for the purpose of the study, counselling is viewed as the act of helping a person (counselee) who may be experiencing difficulties, which could include stressful and/or emotional feelings. The counsellor seeks to assist the counselee to think more clearly, possibly from a different point of view (McLead 2008:12). Therefore, counselling is not about giving advice or attempting to sort out the problem of the counselee or getting emotionally involved with the counselee and being judgemental. Its goal is to facilitate positive change.

Finally, Lartey (1997:88) adds that for counselling to result in good client transformation, the following criteria must be present in the process. These features are typically exhibited nonverbally, such as through gestures, posture, tone of voice, and facial expressions. They are listening, empathy, interpathy, respect, non-possessive warmth, authenticity, concreteness, confrontation, confidentiality, and immediacy. The next section focuses on pastoral counselling.

2.11 Pastoral counselling

Pastoral counselling and pastoral care are terms that are occasionally used interchangeably in some parts of the world to refer to *cura animarum* ("The cure of souls"), despite the fact that they are distinct (Magezi 2007:655-656). Pastoral

counselling is more specialist and concentrates on pastoral caring in the form of discourse and communication to ease pain within the framework of pastoral ministry, whereas pastoral care involves a wide variety of loving acts (Magezi 2016:2). Pastoral ministry is bigger than pastoral care, and pastoral care is greater than pastoral counselling, according to Benner (1992:14–15). Furthermore, aiming to restrict pastoral care to counselling misses the diversity of pastoral care as well as the special characteristics of therapy.

Pastoral counselling is a loving aspect of congregational ministry. It employs insights and principles from theology and the behavioural sciences to engage in a structured, informed, caring dialogue with people and social systems when they have problems, need to make important decisions, or are not taking advantage of their opportunities, with the goal of achieving salvation and growth (Magezi 2016:2). Pastoral therapy differs from other types of counselling in that it is based on a pastoral context and intent. It entails caring inspired by love of God (Deuteronomy 6:5), love of neighbour (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 13:8-10), and care for strangers (Matthew 25:31–46; Hebrews 13:1-2). Pastoral care is a ministry that is delivered by the entire Christian community, not just ordained pastors (Waruta and Kinoti 1994:6). Pastoral care ministry is concerned with the personal and social well-being of God's people, especially divorcees, in terms of physical, psychological, and social health. According to Clebsch and Jaeckle (1964:4), pastoral care "... consists of helping acts done by representative Christian persons, directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons, whose troubles arise in context of ultimate meanings and concerns".

Pastoral care ministry regards the loving Christian as a shepherd (Psalm 7; 23; 52), or guide. The function entails a responsibility to protect, encourage, and guide, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, console the sick, visit imprisoned, and restore the faith of broken souls (Matthew 25:36).

Having stated the above, the researcher agrees with both the Western and African view on both pastoral care and counselling. However, the researcher opines that the Western worldview lacks much of the communal pastoral care and counselling and agrees with Phaswana (2000:33) that the Western view is rich in psychotherapy

counselling but lacking in mutual and communal pastoral care. Pastoral care and counselling in the African worldview is about healing, which is why Bojuwoye (2005:16) says the following about healing and its development in Southern Africa, which holds true for most contemporary African contexts today:

Traditional healing in Southern Africa today can be traced back to when the civilizations' foundations were being formed. The evolution of systems to respond to disease and restore health to sick people is inextricably linked to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which these events occur. Traditional healing, being an inherent element of culture, represents the sum of all beliefs, attitudes, conventions, procedures, and established practices that reflect the people's worldview.

Another author, Mligo (2013:52), writing on the same subject of healing in the African context, says:

African Traditional Religion, as with other world religions, is not a religion that has abandoned healing practices. Healing and wholeness is one of the sole corners of this religion. God's healing ministry cannot be localized only to what we call "biomedicine", and neither can we confine God's dealing with humanity in only one religion. If African Traditional Religion is a religion through which God deals with humanity, then healing is one of the ways in which God works to keep African people whole. In the approach of curing the full person in the community (physically, intellectually, and spiritually), including the repair of interpersonal relationships, traditional healers are seen as community workers who serve the purpose of their community in a variety of health issues.

The point that Mligo (2013), amongst others, is making, which the researcher supports, is that healing practices, beliefs, and methods are contextual. Lastly, healing is expanded and should be viewed as more than physical cure.

Msomi (1992:12) defines pastoral care as "a quest for liberation of the person. as well as the passionate zeal that others be liberated in Christ in their own context, rather than being enslaved in a Christianity that is not their own." Mucherera (2001:17-18) believes that pastoral care should address and respond to people's daily hardships. In Africa, pastoral care concerns guidance and human well-being (Mucherera 2001:17-18). It seeks indigenous resources that uphold human dignity (Phaswana 2000:4-5). Pastoral care in African culture is about looking out for others as well as oneself. According to Phaswana (2000), "members of the community are culturally obligated to

care for each other” in Africa. So, in an African environment, one famous Setswana proverb explains this as follows: *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe* - “A person is a person because of other people”. According to Mbiti (1991:108-109), “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”.

According to Maldonado (1990:vi), pastoral care is a helpful and supportive service provided by ordained pastors or trained laypeople in the church to help people in difficult situations find better options and make their own best decisions. The researcher agrees with Maldonado (1990:12), because the URCSA's church order recognizes that pastoral care and counselling are available to assist and support someone in a difficult situation. Furthermore, Clinebell (1984:26) defines pastoral counselling as the use of a variety of healing or therapeutic strategies to assist individuals in dealing with their issues and crises, resulting in the healing of their brokenness. He sees pastoral counselling as a reparative function required when a person's growth is substantially hampered or obstructed by a crisis.

People require pastoral care at some point in their life. During times of severe distress, they may require pastoral counselling. The researcher believes that pastors, as healers, should aid, guide, and care for divorcees since they require competent pastoral therapy to cope with their conditions. Pastoral care and counselling are essential parts of the Christian church's ministry of healing and liberation, according to Ma Mpolo and Kalu (1985:13). The following is a summary of “brief pastoral counselling” by Stone (1994:22-33):

2.11.1 Establish a brief counselling orientation

This refers to creating and offering the simplest approach that uses the least extreme method that is the least invasive, becoming the simplest approach in any situation. Brief counselling's goal is not to solve all of an individual's or a family's difficulties. It takes the short-term approach, which assumes that a change initiated in one area of a person's life can generate further change and spread to other areas through a “ripple effect” (Stone 1994:35).

2.11.2 Establish an empathetic relationship

It is establishing a solid base of rapport that is acceptable to the troubled person. This could be attained by physically attending to them through listening carefully, temporarily suspending judgement, and offering appropriate warmth and respect. Respect will be gained by establishing a caring relationship with the counselee, for example by showing empathy (Stone 1994:35).

2.11.3 Focus on the problem

One of the most important aspects of pastoral counselling is assisting the counselee in identifying the primary problem(s) in clear and explicit words. Problems must be stated in a way that makes them solvable and the focus should be on them. Where the problem is specified concretely, there will be a better chance of finding a solution (Stone 1994:36).

2.11.4 Assess the problem

The process of assessment is a task for both the pastor and the counselee. It is not a lengthy process, even though the assessment is never completed until the sessions are ended. It literally wants to answer the Why now? question -- which means that the pastor needs to ask the counselee what prompted the request for counselling, and how fast the counselee wants the counselling to go (Stone 1994:36).

2.11.5 Look for exceptions

People seeking counselling at a specific time are of the opinion that their problem exists all the time, to the extent that they do not notice when the problem is absent. Sometimes, when there is no complaint, the counselee dismisses its absence as trivial or it even remains completely unseen or hidden from their view. Therefore, exceptions are very important and could serve as the focus of the counselling; hence the counsellor must be able to notice them (Stone 1994:38).

2.11.6 Establish limited goals

These are clear descriptions of the desired change or solutions that are chosen mutually by the pastor and the counselee. The pastor assists the counselee to formulate a vision for the future and also assists in identifying goals that are realistic, reachable and achievable in a limited period of time. These goals must be negotiated

and mutually adopted by both parties, with the aim of achieving a successful outcome. It is essential for the counsellor to help the counselee not to try to cover too much ground, by trying to change too much, too quickly (Stone 1994:38).

2.11.7 Develop a plan

A plan of action must aim to get the counselee on a path towards resolution, not discussing how big and complex the problem at hand is. This is primarily the responsibility of the pastor, in consultation with the counselee. As the counselling develops, goals are translated into specific tasks, as part of an action plan. In order for the plan to succeed, the individuals must comprehend the specific steps needed to address their difficulties and the steps taken must be achievable in a short period of time (Stone 1994:41).

2.11.8 Remain active in the counselling

In order to get the best output in counselling, the counselling pastor is not expected to be reactive. They need to be more proactive by selecting change procedures that could bring about change. Wells (1982:43) defines a proactive stance as change methods that are structured, comprising a series of steps (or phases) that breaks the process of change into its component parts and guides the activities of both the helper and the counselee (Stone 1994:41).

2.11.9 Assign achievable homework tasks

The minister and counselee need to agree on achievable “homework” tasks, which the counselee needs to complete between counselling sessions. The purpose of such tasks is to reinforce insights gained in a session and to prepare for the following session (Stone 1994:42).

2.11.10 Build upon a counselee’s strengths

During a difficult time, a counselee often tends to ignore their own strength and resources. Therefore, pastoral counselling should build up or energise the counselee’s coping resources and strength by enhancing their self-esteem and getting them to use some of their forgotten strengths. The focus should therefore be less on pathology, problems, and explanations, and more on competence, strengths and solutions (Stone 1994:42).

The next section explains the concept of pastoral care.

2.12 Pastoral care

According to Clinebell (1984:25-26), pastoral care consists of helping activities carried out by people who recognise a transcendent dimension to human life, and which, through the use of verbal or nonverbal, direct or indirect, literal or symbolic modes of communication, aims to prevent, relieve, or facilitate the coping of individuals with anxiety. Furthermore, pastoral care attempts to support people's growth as whole human beings, as well as the establishment of ecologically and socio-politically holistic communities in which all individuals can live humane lives (Clinebell 1984:25-26). The researcher agrees with Clinebell that pastoral care should be a community, congregational concern. Lartey (2003:23) agrees and believes that growth and empowerment, as well as mutual pastoral care within a congregation and its community, are important to any discussions on the subject. That being the situation, pastoral care must be adjusted to African communities' contexts, realities, and needs. Pastoral care and counselling in general have not made adequate efforts to be relevant to the African context, nor have they made efforts to be relevant and contextual to "the living human documents" or "the living human web" (a term coined by the Rev. Dr. Anton Boisen) of South Africa (Boisen 1952).

A lot has been written about pastoral care from Western perspectives, whereas academic theological reflection on pastoral care in Africa has a short history compared to those in Europe and North America. Phaswana (2000:31) states that there are few articles and books focusing on pastoral care and counselling by Africans for Africans. As a result, the communal pastoral approach that distinguishes African pastoral care has not reached audiences in the Global North. He acknowledges, however, that the Western and African worldviews do not always compete, but rather complement one another. African literature on this subject is of great interest, he continues, and it is important to remember that in the past, most African theological institutions, if not all, were established by Western theologians, with a Western curriculum and tutored by Western teachers and professors (Phaswana 2000:31).

Msomi (1992:10) suggests that “it is appropriate for pastoral care as a discipline to continually take seriously the cultural, social, religious and political factors in the context of its operation”. In his opinion, pastoral care is involved with ministering to the person in the circumstances in which they find themselves. Msomi (1992:12) is one of several African theologians who share a desire for contextualisation, which he refers to as the “rooting” of Christianity in African soil. According to Phaswana (2000:61), Msomi wants theology to be practiced in Africa. Pastoral theology, in particular, must be understood from an African perspective, taking into account the viewpoints of African Christian women.

The study indicates that Western culture has consistently influenced pastoral care. Many theories and paradigms used in the developing world, particularly those from the United States and the United Kingdom, have Western origins (Buffel 2007:179). Msomi (1993:75) observes that this issue has persisted in the Southern African context for too long, making the African pastorate appear as a replica of its European, British, and North American counterparts.

Kapolo (2001:129) agrees, claiming that African family difficulties cannot be successfully addressed within the context of Western family structures, particularly those in Europe and North America. Acolatse (2014:173) agrees, claiming that while African pastoral care values local cultural traditions more than Western and Asian approaches, the unconscious is typically ignored or suppressed by an African worldview and a single biblical worldview.

According to Browning (1991:36), practical theology should be based on “a critical reflection on the church's dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation”. A multifaceted and multidisciplinary theory of pastoral care is required for such an approach (Dreyer 2005:109). Immink (2003:178) agrees with Van der Ven (1990:117) in identifying the interaction between practical theology and the social sciences as a “critical relation”. For him, “critical” indicates that practical theology determines the research domain through a theological knowledge of praxis (experience). According to Dreyer (2005:109), a theological theory will provide a different reconstruction of reality than the social sciences since religion is viewed as a

faith praxis rather than a social or psychological phenomena. Practical theologians are consequently pushed to explore the philosophical assumptions underlying scientific methodologies, as well as the potential value of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology in their theological discourse (Browning 1991:81).

The most challenging aspect of pastoral care is listening to people's stories through a theological lens. The goal is to understand and transform in response to these narratives (Velkamp 1988:198–199). Therefore, a theological study should be conducted, integrating the stories of humanity and God. Bons-Storm describes this as a hermeneutical experience (1989:85).

2.13 Premarital counselling

Premarital counselling, according to Mashau (2016b:15), involves the guidance of a couple in preparation for a lasting and healthy marital life. Mashau (2016b) sees premarital counselling as a method that can help couples grasp the fundamentals of marriage and their duties, preparing them for the marriage journey. It is thus a method of enriching a relationship so that it has the best chance of developing into a satisfying and secure marriage. The researcher agrees with Mashau (2016b), because the URCSA church ordinance encourages Ministers of the Word to conduct premarital counselling for couples planning to marry. Zikhali (2009:26) goes on to argue that premarital counselling as a preventive measure, consisting of programs geared toward potential post-marriage problems and providing couples with information and resources, could effectively alleviate or even prevent such problems.

According to Zikhali (2009:27), premarital courses are beneficial in reducing divorce and improving marriage satisfaction. People seek counsel in a variety of methods, including prayer, from others, their religious membership, and other sources. Religious premarital counselling programs, on the other hand, are intended to help couples develop a biblical worldview and foundation for their marriage (Waters 2003:41). The goal of premarital counselling is to resolve any issues in the relationship prior to marriage, as well as to prepare the couple for what to expect in a marital relationship. Additionally, it provides the pair with strong communication skills, allowing them to address difficulties as they emerge (Zikhali 2009:10).

Khathide (2000:12) argues that in the Roman Catholic Church, for example, it is rare for a priest to marry two persons who have not received proper premarital counselling, because the Catholic Church believes that marriage is a sacrament and is indissoluble. When premarital counselling has been carried out and presented properly and effectively, it will produce a mindset in a couple of how a marriage should turn out. It instils an awareness that the health of a marriage partnership is not a matter of fate, but the product of the decisions the partners make and the actions they undertake every day, for years to come (Markman and Hahlweg 1993:52). Furthermore, they argue that premarital counselling is based on a preventative approach, with the goal of beginning with happy couples and assisting them in maintaining their relatively high levels of functioning. Premarital counselling is best defined as a knowledge- and skill-based training technique that tries to educate couples on how to strengthen their relationship (Senediak 1990:34). Premarital counselling is intended to resolve potential relationship issues while also preparing the couple for marriage (Waters 2003:50). Khathide (2000:68-77) cites the example of an airline pilot to demonstrate the need of premarital counselling: It takes a long time, hard work, and rigorous training to be able to fly an airplane. Flying an airplane entails transporting passengers from one location to another, and it affects the lives of others, not just the pilot. Taking on such a task should necessitate many hours of study, expertise, quality, and vigilance. The same ideas apply in marriage. Couples planning to marry must be adequately taught in Christian ideas and beliefs, which implies that there is no substitute for extensive preparation.

Premarital counselling leads to immediate and short-term gains in relationship quality and interpersonal skills (Carroll and Doherty 2003:14). It brings some sense of mental sobriety to the two people concerned and assists them to think realistically about money, house, children, sex, and life after the wedding day (Khathide 2000:13).

Finally, it is a very good learning curve, which affords each partner the opportunity to learn more about their future life partner, such as:

- Their character and their thinking style;
- Their vision of life;
- Their partner's past, weaknesses and strengths;
- Areas that need help and improvement; and

- The in-laws (who play a significant role in shaping a marriage).

Many institutions, including churches, believe that premarital counselling is an effective way to combat the high divorce rate. It is not only a reactionary but also a preventative technique that, when done correctly, leads to the formation of solid and long-lasting marriages. The goal of premarital counselling is to identify and treat any issues in the relationship prior to marriage, as well as to prepare the couple for what to expect in a marital relationship.

Mashau (2016b:116) states that if we are serious about solving problems, such as premarital sex, cohabitation, marital problems and the high divorce rate, pastors and ministers of the Word should be encouraged to engage in the practice of premarital counselling. Adams (1978:105) says marriage counselling must be early, educational, and preventative. In the Scriptures we are taught: "Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs. 11:14, 15:22). Kathide (2000:12) also quotes this passage and adds Ps. 106:13 and Isa. 28:29.

The researcher believes that premarital counselling and marriage preparation are incomplete without addressing the specific contexts and challenges of an African marriage.

Premarital counselling at the same time has its challenges and disadvantages. According to Chisale (2016:55), both Christian and traditional indigenous approaches to premarital counselling fuel intimate wife abuse, gender-based violence (GBV), and violence against women (VAW) in marriage contexts by promoting a "dangerous masculine and feminine" conception of marriage. According to him, these premarital counselling approaches are gendered in a way that promotes and excuses intimate wife abuse in marriage circumstances, therefore complicating a woman's struggle against gender-based violence. (Chisale 2016:55). The African cultural beliefs that are promoted in such counselling, make Christian women stay in abusive relationships (Phiri 2002:21). According to Chisale (2016:55), among the Ndebele, wife violence is perceived as discipline and affection in a traditional context rather than abuse. Phiri (2002:24) goes on to say that in a marriage, a man believes he owns a woman,

implying that there is no collaboration between husband and wife, but rather male domination and female submission.

Marital violence is common in many parts of Africa and many women have experienced some kind of violence from their intimate partners (Siwila 2012:105). According to Siwila (2012), some have even lost their lives. Some experience emotional violence. Chisale (2016:55) describes emotional violence where there are no physical scars on the woman's body, no evidence of physical beating, but an experience of loneliness and fear of being blamed by the extended family and the community for failing to be a good wife. Chisale (2016) contends that the wounds of emotional violence never heal; the bleeding never stops, the pain endures and the fear runs deep.

According to Baloyi (2013a:47), in Africa, intimate violence appears to be an accepted method of controlling wives. Some spouses believe that striking their wives or using violence against them is a form of discipline. An ordained male minister from Phiri's study (2002:24) verified this belief by asking Phiri how he was supposed to discipline his wife if beating her was prohibited. This suggests that there are Christian husbands who practise and justify wife violence, from a position of patriarchal authority (Chisale 2016:58).

According to Phiri (2002:24), sexual intercourse is also used as a weapon of domination:

It is assumed that a married woman should not say no to her husband's sexual advances. It is further assumed that the day she said, "I do" on the wedding day, she also said yes to have sex with her husband whenever he wants.

The Circle of Concerned Africa Woman Theologians, commonly referred to as "The Circle", has supported the view that premarital pastoral care and counselling is patriarchal. Njoroge (1997:81) describes patriarchy as:

... a destructive powerhouse characterized by systemic and normative inequities. It also has an impact on the overall order of creation. Its roots are deeply embedded in society and the church, so we need well-equipped and motivated women and men to bring patriarchy to its knees.

The Circle was established in 1989 to support study, writing, and publication by a pan-African network of women from various religions and races who are interested in the impact of religion and culture on African women (Oduyoye 2001:10).

Adults in families, community leaders, and family friends, particularly adult women, offer the majority of premarital counselling in African traditional or indigenous contexts. According to theological literature, Christian premarital counselling is influenced by missionary activity and Western conceptions (Kapolo 2001:129). Chisale (2016:57) further claims that missionaries highlighted women's devotion to men, particularly their spouses, hence strengthening patriarchal African traditional societies. Phiri (2002:20) persuasively argues that patriarchal institutions in African culture are reinforced by biblical patriarchy, and that Christian women are not immune to domestic abuse in their households. According to Phiri (2002), African culture and the Bible both play important roles in influencing African women's lives. Chisale (2016:66) concludes that there is a fine line between premarital counselling and gender-based violence. Premarital counselling, according to Chisale (2016:66), is patriarchal and forces women to submit to males; it exposes spouses to gender-based or intimate wife violence; and it is a death sentence for women.

Having examined the domains of pastoral counselling, care, and premarital counselling, the attention now shifts to hermeneutics and the understanding of narrative approaches.

2.14 Hermeneutics as an approach to understanding

As indicated in Chapter 1. (cf. 1.6.8), this study is hermeneutical in nature, since it strives to interpret the stories of some married couples as well as relevant biblical passages that shape a Christian view of marriage but are often used misunderstood and misinterpreted.

According to Dreyer (2005:112), hermeneutics refers to a process of looking back to reflect on what has been said in the communication process. What is said be it by word that are come from the mouth or written communication at the end it must be understood very well.

Klaasen (2020:2) defines hermeneutics as the process for achieving a knowledge of written materials that are considered meaningful on a personal level. Capps (1984:11) regards hermeneutics, or the science of interpretation, as an approach that could be useful for understanding and evaluating pastoral work. According to Dreyer (2005:110), hermeneutic principles have been applied to social and political action, and Capps (1984:11) believes they might be used to better comprehend pastoral practices. In his book, *Biblical approaches to pastoral counselling*, Capps (1981:11) says:

In reviewing the literature on the use of the Bible in pastoral counselling, I was struck by how little current biblical studies have influenced these conversations. Some authors promote current biblical research methods, while others criticize them, yet neither party frequently cites biblical experts' writings. It is easy to see why this is the case. Biblical studies have become a specialized field, and their writing is frequently too academic or narrowly focused to be useful in pastoral counselling. A related issue is that biblical studies are a massive endeavour, and it is not always easy to select the studies that promise to be most effective in pastoral counselling among the enormous literature. The enormous scope and complexity of biblical studies often intimidates those who represent practical theological disciplines. As a result, most publications and articles on the Bible's role in pastoral counselling lack appropriate biblical study. When one desires to use current biblical studies to pastoral counselling, the challenging question is, "How can one do so?"

In his book *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics* (1984), Capps finds hermeneutical theory conducive to making the hermeneutical transition from text to meaningful deeds and applies it to pastoral actions. Gerkin (1986:22; see also Gerkin 1991) argues that the proposed Practical Theology is characterized most accurately as a narrative hermeneutical practical theology. This approach emphasizes two crucial factors:

1. Every scenario involving humans and human behaviour (communicative acts of faith) has a meaning that is derived from a narrative framework. These interpretations come from an assortment of narratives that elucidate the causes and significance of certain events.
2. Situations involving people must be interpreted in the framework of a lengthy narrative that clarifies how they should be comprehended in order to be understood and responded to. Instead of the other way around, human behaviour is a reflection of these interpretations.

Regarding the hermeneutical aspect of Practical Theology, we must begin from our current position. This is referred to by Pieterse (1991:44) as the actuality and practice of God. God is the one who initiates in this situation. In this circumstance, God takes the initiative. He reaches out to people with kindness and love, exposing Himself as a living, acting, revealing, and speaking God, most notably via Jesus Christ and the Bible. The Bible, God's Word, is revealed and interpreted by the Holy Spirit. In the pastoral setting, all participants engage in a hermeneutical service that includes the Bible, Christian tradition, the pastor, and the participants.

Tieleman (1993:25–26) argues that pastoral care is most effective when it employs a religious language that is anthropologically oriented and conveys life and faith experiences without explicitly referring to God. The narrative extends beyond mere meaning; it encompasses the expression and sense of harmony between faith and life. Clarifying experiences often involves asking about their meaning. In pastoral speech, the coherence and interconnectedness of one's personal story and religious symbols should be highlighted (Du Plooy:71). Heitink (1990:123) emphasizes that providing meaning is a vital aspect of pastoral care, with the hermeneutical dimension being a crucial part of this meaning-making process. In this process, the pastor acts as a guide, helping the couple discover the significance of their life experience in relation to God's story. Being with people while they seek understanding in the context of their Christian faith is known as pastoral care (Veltkamp 1988:229).

2.15 Narrative approach understanding

As this study engages through storytelling, it is necessary to explore the notion of “narrative”. Life is about stories. According to Dinkins (2005:11), each person is a collection of stories.

In the interviewing of the participants (married couples and divorcees), as reported in Chapter 4, they were requested to tell their lived stories. Narrative functions as a way of understanding, involving the use of a framework to organize experiences while assuming that human actions are intentional (Czarniawska 2004:7). The couples shared their stories of how they met and married, providing valuable information for

this study's research question. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012:34), narrative research starts with individuals' experiences that they went through and stories they were told. Fee and Stuart (2003:90) agrees with Bloomberg and Volpe when they stated that "Narratives are stories that consciously recount historical events in order to provide meaning and direction to a certain group of people in the present".

The narrative approach of story analysis focuses on how stories are outlined, and story interpretation offers numerous benefits in counselling (Beeselaar 2011:105). According to Steyn (2010:59), narrative therapy aims to separate the individual's identity from the particular challenge they are facing, so the person is not "a problem" (or "the problem"). This process to separate problem and person is called "externalisation" and is a fundamental feature of narrative therapy. Wimberly (2003:28) refers to this process as externalisation.

An alternative approach entails that externalisation is the decision to face the suffering generated by prioritising unfavourable stories and interactions. (Wimberly 2003:28). Negative conversation – telling negative stories about oneself – has a negative impact on people.

Narrative method offers respectful listening while assisting with the process of externalizing the problem.

Listening "with many ears" is important to healing. Beeselaar (2011:37) cites Paul Tillich: "The first duty of love is to listen" Dinkins (2005:25) explains the importance of such listening in a Christian community:

In addition, Dinkins (2005:16) emphasizes the value of telling and hearing tales when a community is being formed as followings:

Lastly, Dinkins (2005:36) acknowledges that narrative and/or story telling has gained new relevance in a time of postmodernity:

The narrative method selected for this study embodies a mindset of "not knowing" (Dinkins 2005:35) as it seeks to understand experiences as expressed in couples'

lived stories, and then using these narratives as a source of knowledge to develop a narrative premarital counselling program.

2.16 What is meant by postmodern?

Dinkins's (2005:36) suggestion that narrative approaches have received new relevance in the present "postmodern" age requires reflection.

The only way to comprehend and describe the characteristics of the postmodern era and society we live in is to draw comparisons with modernity (Magamba 2016:21). The Enlightenment and the age of reason are synonymous with the modern era, which is defined by Johnson (2014:4-5) as follows:

Magamba (2016:21) postulates that as culture progresses from modernity to postmodernity, it reveals the limitations and flaws of modernity. Johnson (2014:6-7) goes on to explain:

According to Magamba (2016:23), modernity seems to depict humanity, not God, as omniscient. It portrays mortal men and women as the source of knowledge (Magamba 2016:23). However, a postmodern way of living is eager for knowledge. Though it is not perfect, the postmodern viewpoint is moving away from associating humanity with divinity and acknowledges that our thinking and reasoning are influenced by the postmodern period and society. (Magamba 2016:23).

2.17 Theoretical framework

As stated in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.7) the study was conducted through the lenses of Osmer contextual theory and URCSA Belhar Confession of 1986 as one of the key sources of performing normative task in Osmer's practical theology framework.

2.17.1 Contextual theory

Contextual theory serves as the study's first theoretical framework. Bosch (1991:83) writes that from missiological concept dimension that "Contextualization is a

missiological term that outlines both the infections that have harmed our effectiveness as psychologists and counsellors and recommends a solution for them”.

Contextual theory provides a framework for making premarital therapy relevant to couples in their particular social, cultural, political, and religious settings, according to the researcher in reference to this study. This suggests that the researcher makes an effort to understand the needs for stable marriage within the social environment of the attendees so that prospective couples may understand it within the parameters of their culture.

Conversations and activities take place against the backdrop of context. It offers the temporal framework necessary for understanding, decision-making, and the production of outcomes. Analysing the context and comprehending how it affects our priorities, ideas, attitudes, affirmations, and action plans is the process of contextualisation. It is the evolution of new identities over time, incorporating cutting-edge components into old contexts. Therefore, context is essential for communication, rather than content (Sugden 2000:3).

Luzbetak (1988:83) describes the aim of contextualization as “the integration of the text with the context”. Therefore, teaching marital stability skills to engaged couples involves combining content and context to facilitate the desired outcomes (Bawa 2017:93).

Bawa (2017) goes on to say that this viewpoint aligns with Apostle Paul’s teachings, who stated: “I became all things to all men in order that I might win some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul’s comment, according to Bawa (2017:94), demonstrates his conviction that the best way to win over new converts is to integrate the gospel’s substance with the context of his audience. It also reflects Paul’s understanding of what we now termed “cultural anthropology” (Bawa 2017:94).

Cheeseman (2003:83) defines cultural anthropology as “the study of man’s social and belief systems and how they affect life.” It offers a comprehensive perspective on mankind by examining how people interact with the intricate networks of ingrained beliefs, practices, and commodities that make up their communities.

The researcher suggests that, in light of this conversation, clergy who offer premarital counselling have to become knowledgeable about cultural anthropology as the basis of contextual theory. The purpose of contextual theory in this course is to provide students with the information necessary to successfully connect with individuals in their different circumstances, much like the Apostle Paul did. This theoretical framework is relevant to the research because it establishes the foundation for creating an African premarital counselling strategy that will help accomplish the study's goals.

2.17.2 Family Therapy paradigms

The family system theory focuses on how interconnected pieces interact within a larger whole. Family systems theory views the family as the basic interpersonal setting in which individual character traits and resulting patterns of behaviour are learnt and reinforced (Bowen 1978:16-17). Bowen (1978) properly notes that an individual's symptoms occur as a result of familial interactions. Olsen (1993:23) posits and adequately assert that in order to understand family therapy and to work effectively from an integrated model, one must know the basic paradigms of family therapy (Olsen 1993:21). The following family paradigms are briefly outlined: family solving therapy, structural family therapy, interaction theory, multigenerational theory, and object relations theory.

- **Family solving therapy**

This is a short-term family therapy technique that emphasizes the development of family problem-solving abilities. During family therapy, the family selects which specific difficulties to address. The family therapist then works with the family on both in-session and out-of-session projects (homework) to help the family acquire problem-solving skills to deal with the issues that brought them into therapy.

- **Structural family therapy**

This therapy focuses on families' structural hierarchies and how they organize themselves. It asserts that each intact family contains at least three subsystems: parental, marital, and sibling.

- Parental subsystem

The parental system (mother and father in an intact family) serves to provide firm enough boundaries to discipline the children, establish developmentally appropriate boundaries, and guarantee that family responsibilities are completed. They also examine generational boundaries to see how well the family maintains boundaries between generations and to determine the influence of extended family.
- Marital subsystem

The marital subsystem is of particular interest to the structural family. If the marital subsystem is not nurtured or if the marriage is in serious difficulty, then the parental subsystem will have difficulty in functioning. A troubled marriage can often lead to triangles or difficulties with boundaries.
- Sibling subsystem

The sibling subsystem includes brothers, sisters, step siblings, and any other children in the family. Individual development and many family behaviour patterns can be traced to autonomous activity within the sibling subsystem, however this is typically disregarded.
- Interaction theory

Interactional theorists believe that interactional feedback loops often govern behaviour as well as communication. For example, the more over responsible a wife becomes, the more under responsible her husband becomes. The less he does, the more she does, the more she does, the less he does. This interaction is complementary and mutually reinforcing. Other examples of complementary interactions would be an assertive wife and a submissive husband, or a pursuing wife and a withdrawing husband.
- Multigenerational theory

Multigenerational theory examines how families pass on themes and patterns across generations. It is the transmission of marital patterns, ways of being in relationships, and even psychopathology through multiple generations in a family. For example, drunkenness and incest can typically be traced back at least three generations.

- Object relations theory

Object relations theorists see families as a system of sets of relationships, including internalized object relations of each of its members. It is more concerned with the way one internalizes early primary relationships and self-images. These internalized relationships or persons form a map or model that can greatly influence spouse selection and relational dynamics. Problems in relations results primarily from unconscious attempts to reenact, externalize, or master intrapsychic conflicts originating in one's family of origin. For example, if a woman had a domineering father and unconsciously internalizes his image, she may marry a domineering husband and try to work through her conflicts with her father in the marital relationship. One task, then, of object relationship therapy is to attempt to understand the internalized objects of each of the family members, and to understand the present in the light of one's inner object world and one's unconscious attempts to modify close relationships to fit internal role models.

2.17.3 Belhar Confession of URCSA

After examining various theories, the researcher deduced that the Belhar Confession of 1986 from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa is the most significant source for carrying out and accomplishing the normative task. On April 14, 1994, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) merged to establish the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Belgic Confession (1561, revised 1619), the Canons of Dort (1618-1619), and the Confession of Belhar were the four confessions (unity standards) that the URCSA approved at the Founding Synod (Skema Van Werksaamhede en Handelingte VGKSA 1997:26, 504). It was named after the 'coloured' township (Belhar), which hosted the Founding Synod.

According to Boesak (2008:421), the Confession of Belhar was approved by the DRMC Synod in 1982 and formally recognized as the fourth confession in 1986. Since its adoption, the Belhar Confession has become the foundation of the doctrinal identity of the URCSA, as noted by Boesak (2008:241). Many Reformed churches worldwide have adopted the Belhar Confession as their official confession throughout the past

25 years (Boesak 2008:421). Contrary to popular belief, the Confession of Belhar was never intended to be used as a “stok om mee te slaan” (a stick to beat with) (Smit 2009b:299). Smit (2009b:299) maintains that confessions are not solely authored for liturgical purposes, as is often believed. Confessions serve several purposes:

- They provide the church with a language to proclaim God’s praise, both in liturgy and ordinary life.
- They become hermeneutical lenses by which to read the Scriptures.
- They express identity and thereby contribute to the sense of belonging.
- They assist in instructing and forming new believers.
- They help the church to distinguish truth from falsehood.
- They serve as forms of public witness to Jesus Christ the as the gospel (Smith 2009b:302).

Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2017:24) accurately notes that the confession tackles three major biblical concerns that all churches should be concerned about: church and human unity, reconciliation within the church and society, and God's justice. Based on this, the researcher believes that the Belhar Confession will be relevant and useful in this study, which aims to address the following crucial question: How can a URCSA congregation help to facilitating lasting marriage partnerships among its members through a premarital preparation process/program that supports in:

- Prepare black couples for a married life;
- Build their confidence to enter married life; and
- Provide marriage skills?

The relevance of the Belhar Confession is, therefore, not confined to southern Africa, and the use or application of this confession in the life of the church is far wider than its original context (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2017:24).

The Confession of Belhar of 1986 states in Article 2

Church unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ, that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality that must be earnestly pursued and sought: one that the people of God must continually be built up to attain; that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and

accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (MyT 2014:17).

The Confession of Belhar is regarded as an authentic expression of Reformed Theology for our times and contexts. It is considered an irreplaceable gift to the church of Jesus Christ both nationally and internationally. Additionally, it holds more than just "sentimental value" and is therefore honoured and embraced by churches in the Reformed family worldwide (Agenda General Synod URCSA 2008:31).

2.17.4 Origin of Belhar Confession

Belhar's origins are in some ways inextricably linked to the National Party's apartheid policies (Adonis 2017:355). The old Wynberg presbytery of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Southern Africa (DRMC) became intimately involved in apartheid measures as early as 1950 (Loff 1998:248). By then, Dr. Malan's NP had gained a political victory and had established apartheid policies. Apartheid was already referred to as a 'church policy' in *Die Kerkbode* on 22 September 1948 (Loff 1998:233).

On behalf of 116 church members from 27 congregations of the old Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), Mr. J. Abrahamse wrote to the moderamen in 1950, denouncing apartheid as unchristian and requesting that it be rejected by the church as well as by the larger community (Adonis 2017:356). But, these members received no assistance from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) or the DRMC leadership. Adonis (2017:356) notes that the DRMC decided in its 1950 Synod to neither approve nor reject any political stance, indicating a lack of consistency in the Synod's rulings. Gradually, the DRMC started criticising more aspects of apartheid policy. In the 1970s, the DRMC's Theological School, which was then a component of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), requested that the church assess apartheid theologically (Adonis 2017:356). The theological criticism of apartheid was greatly aided by Professor J.J.F. Durand and his theology students (Adonis 2017:356). The students asked the DRMC to formally embrace a new stance, claiming that forced separation of individuals was against the gospel of reconciliation (Loff 1998:251). Reverends J.J.F. Mettler, I.J. Mentor, and R.J. Stevens stated their position to the DRMC Synod, according to Adonis (2017:355), highlighting how the apartheid policy went against the gospel of Jesus Christ and was to be opposed (Loff 1998:252). After much discussion

and several amendments, the synod finally embraced this position, which was a major turning point (Adonis 2017:356). But, as Adonis points out, the DRC's mission strategy was turned down (2017:356). The DRMC's repudiation of apartheid was a major step towards the reconciliation of the DRC church family. Declaring apartheid incompatible with the gospel fuelled the goal of structural church unity (Loff 1998:253). According to Adonis (2017:355), in 1990, the DRCA and the DRMC held a convent in Belhar (Cape Town), which culminated in a unification between the two churches in 1994. The merger was originally scheduled for 1990, but was postponed since the DRCA had not yet ratified the Belhar Confession (Adonis 2017:360). The DRMC decided not to withdraw the confession, and the merger proceeded once the DRCA recognised the Belhar Confession as can be seen in the following excerpt:

The church's merger, which was scheduled for 1990, was eventually celebrated with tremendous delight and excitement on April 14, 1994. This significant event occurred in the same church structure where the Confession of Belhar was officially adopted in 1986. At the 1994 DRMC Synod, a "unification provision" was drafted to ensure that the unification process was carried out in a fair and just manner. There were approximately 45 ministers in the previous DRMC who gave the impression that they were a "pressure group against church unification" (Loff 1998:273). The DRMC Synod established a "ad hoc commission for pastoral discourse" to openly assist congregation members with their "issues, anxieties, doubts, and uncertainties" about the subject. This commission also proposed that such members be treated as DRMC members and, following unification, as URCSA members. In Bloemfontein in 1997, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Africa (ERCA) joined the URCSA. The DRC created the ERCA Reformed Church in Namibia in 1975 (Acta VGKSA 1997:427-428).

2.18 Conclusion

This chapter introduced this research related to the investigation of premarital care and counselling for couples' preparation for marriage. This chapter also provided a theoretical overview of literature dealing with marriage, counselling, and premarital counselling in context and within the practical theological framework. It defined premarital counselling and outlined its context and importance. To find a pastoral premarital counselling paradigm for the URCSA is the aim of the research. The research methodology and design utilized for the study's empirical component are the main topics of the upcoming chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the Literature review of the study which covered the concepts of marriage institution, counselling, and pre-marriage counselling in Christian African context. This chapter outlines the choice of the research design and method utilized. This covers all related methodological issues, including population, sampling, data processing, and research design. Furthermore, it outlines the roadmap followed, which is Osmer's (2008) methodology for practical theological research, as mentioned in Chapter 1. It therefore includes, amongst other things, the context of the arrangement and conditions for collection and analysis of data.

3.2 Qualitative Method/Approach

The researcher picked the qualitative research method, not because it is superior or worse to quantitative. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998:10-11), qualitative research is any sort of research that produces findings that are not obtained using statistical techniques or other quantification methods. The decision was made based on the researcher's desire to learn more about marriage preparation and pre-marital counselling.

The qualitative research method is a systematic, participatory, subjective way to describing and interpreting life events (Grove *et al.* 2013:705). According to Fossey *et al.* (2002:717), qualitative research is a broad umbrella word for research strategies that investigate, depict, and explain people's experiences, behaviours, interactions, and social situations without the use of statistical procedures or quantitative methods. In addition to studying organizational performance, social movements, cultural phenomena, and cross-national linkages, it may also relate to studies of people's lives, lived experiences, emotions, and sentiments. Furthermore, Rubin and Babbie (1997:26) define qualitative research methods as those that emphasize depth of

understanding and the deeper meanings of human experience, with the goal of producing theoretically richer findings.

In order to answer the research questions of the study, a qualitative research approach was employed, as stated. The researcher agrees with Leavy (2017:124) who postulates that qualitative research approaches value depth of meaning that arises from people's subjective experiences and their meaning-making processes. These methodologies enable a researcher to get a thorough grasp of a topic by dissecting the meanings that individuals assign to their lives, actions, and situations (Leavy 2017:124).

According to Creswell (1994:145), some of the characteristics of the qualitative approach are as follows:

- a. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. With this research endeavour, the researcher was mainly interested in the meaning that married, separated and divorced couples attach to their experiences relating to marriage preparation (or a lack thereof) that was experienced in the URCSA.
- b. The primary instrument through which data collection and analysis are carried out is the qualitative researcher. Data, in this case, is not collected via inventories, questionnaires, or machines but rather through the intermediary of a human being (who conducts interviews and takes part in participant observation).
- c. There is fieldwork for qualitative research, where the researcher visits the people, setting, site or institution in order to observe their behaviour or carry out the necessary recordings within their natural habitat.
- d. Research that is qualitative is exploratory, and subsequently, the researcher aims to investigate a phenomena.
- e. The descriptive character of qualitative research piques the attention of the researcher, who is concerned with the meaning, method, and information attained via the use of words and/or images.
- f. Qualitative research is an inductive process in which the researcher develops abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories based on the participants' words or narratives.

In view of the aforementioned characteristics inherent in the qualitative approach, and considering that qualitative research involves studying people in their natural context based on what they do within their lives as a whole was enough to make the researcher draw a conclusion that it was ideal for this research to be carried using this method. The latter was formulated as “The primary goal and objective of the research project is to search and/or develop a marriage preparation model (framework) or process”.

From this qualitative stance, the researcher would like to develop a premarital preparation pastoral model (framework) for couples in a specific URCSA congregation who intend and have plans to get married. As the search continues the key source for performing the normative task in Osmer’s practical theology framework was the Belhar Confession of 1986 of URCSA.

3.3 Research design

Research design refers to all of the decisions that a researcher makes when preparing his or her study, and it is a blueprint that acts as a logical plan for how the research will proceed (De Vos *et al.* 2011:307). Furthermore, it guides the researcher in organizing and carrying out the study in the most effective method to reach the specified goal. Burns and Grove (2009:745) describe it as the study’s blueprint. Logic also contributes to a study’s validity and accuracy (Yin 2011:78).

According to Grinnell and Williams (1990:138), a research design is the overall plan we utilize to help answer our research questions. As part of the strategy, the researcher determined which research questions should be used (Annexure B), what data was required to answer them, from whom the data should be gathered, and the best method for gathering the data. As a result, the researcher believes that data analysis, verification, and study results should all be part of the research design, or the “total plan” mentioned by the authors above.

Botman *et al.* (2010:40) explicitly state that research design and technique are related to the guidelines and protocols that outline how the researcher must examine or explore what they think needs to be understood in order to emphasize the significance and necessity of the research design.

3.4 Population

A population, in the words of Marlow (1998:134), is "the sum of all possible cases that the researcher is ultimately interested in studying." According to Burns and Groves (2009:42), a population is any group of people, things, or substances that satisfy certain requirements in order to be included in a given universe. In a similar vein, the population is defined by Brink *et al.* (2012:131) as the totality of the individuals or objects that match the researcher's requirements for examination. On the other hand, a population, according to Depoy and Gitlin (2013:161), is made up of three things: it must have every attribute listed as an inclusion criterion; it must not have any attributes listed as an exclusion criterion; and it must theoretically be sampleable.

The population for this study has been limited to 18 volunteers from one of the URCSA congregations in Pretoria, Gauteng Province. Although study limitations are required for practical reasons and to improve study management, they are inescapable (Buffel 2007:85). It will be more challenging to draw broad conclusions on marriage preparations in general due to this restriction, but the breadth and calibre of the data gathered are the researcher's main concerns.

There was a total of 18 participants in the study, others still married and staying together, others are separated and not staying together but not divorced, and others divorced and staying apart (Refer to Annexure E). These couples are members of the specific URCSA congregation and have all been married for over ten years.

3.5 Sampling

A sample, according to Burns and Grove (2009:42), is a portion of the population chosen for a specific research. From the population, a sample or subset of the population was selected for inclusion in the study (Yegidis and Weinbach 1996:115). Qualitative researchers purposefully or intentionally select individuals for inclusion in the sample based on their knowledge of and capacity to explain the phenomenon or part of the phenomenon under investigation (Donalek and Soldwisch 2004:356). According to Fossey *et al.* (2002:726), qualitative sampling is concerned with information-richness and should be guided by two fundamental considerations:

appropriateness and adequacy. In other words, qualitative sampling necessitates the selection of appropriate participants, individuals who can best enlighten the study. It also necessitates a proper sampling of information sources (i.e. persons, places, events, and data kinds) in order to address the research question and build a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under investigation.

According to Polit and Beck (2014:51), data is gathered from a sample by researchers, and a sampling strategy specifies the size of the sample and the number of participants. Participants in the study included married couples and some divorced persons from one of the URCSA congregations in Pretoria, Gauteng Province, despite the fact that some had been separated and divorced during their marriage. The rationale behind selecting this subgroup was that, by examining a more limited number of factors, they might fairly represent the population and enable the researcher to make pertinent inferences about the population as a whole (Depoy and Gitlin 2013:161).

3.5.1 Sampling techniques

The sample method employed was qualitative purposive non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling, as defined by Depoy and Gitlin (2013:161), involves selecting individuals or elements based on preset criteria. According to Struwig and Stead (2001:121), deliberate sampling prioritizes the depth and complexity of collected data. According to Struwig and Stead (2002:121), purposeful sampling involves selecting people with relevant information rather than random selection. Participants exhibit features and information of relevance to the researcher (Buffel 2007:87).

The researcher used the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, according to Yegidis and Weinbach (1996:122), is founded on the idea that the researcher will have access to some specialist insight or a unique perspective, experience, trait, or condition that he or she wishes to comprehend. As a result, the purposive sample strategy enabled the researcher to handpick couples who could provide rich, detailed explanations of their perspectives until data saturation (Brink *et al.* 2012:141; Stommel and Wills 2004:302). It is important to note that a specific sample size cannot be determined at the start of the study; however, the number of participants to be included in the sample will only be known once the data has reached

a point of “saturation,” that is when the information being gathered becomes repetitive (Donalek and Soldwisch 2004:356; Fossey *et al.* 2002:726; Tutty *et al.* 1996:82).

Consequently, the number of people interviewed depends more on whether the required information categories have been saturated than on a predetermined number. Similarly, Glazer and Strauss (1999:61) agree that a sociologist aiming to find grounded theory cannot forecast how many groups will be sampled throughout the study, because the total number of groups can only be determined at the study's conclusion.

In the context of the current study, participants were selected from one of the URCSA congregations in Pretoria, Gauteng Province, because the researcher believed they possessed valuable insights into marriage challenges due to their experience with premarital counselling prior to starting their marital journey.

3.5.2 Sampling criteria

Sampling criteria were determined by the study challenge, purpose and objectives, design, and practical implications of the research topic. Sampling or eligibility criteria are defined by Grove and Ciper (2016:25) as a collection of requirements or characteristics required to be a part of the target population. According to Grove *et al.* (2013:353), sample requirements sometimes include age limits and may involve abilities such as reading, writing responses on forms or data collection instruments, and understanding English. They also contend that the sample criteria should not be so stringent as to hinder the researcher from obtaining a adequate number of study participants (Grove *et al.* 2013:353).

3.5.3 Recruitment strategy

The researcher first requested permission to conduct a study from the Church Council of the URCSA congregation (Annexure B). The researcher's request was examined by the Church Council, which authorised the study to be carried out. (Annexure C).

The researcher proceeded with the next step to sample participants. Qualitative purpose non-probability sampling was used to select participants for the research. This was based on the assumption that it would provide the researcher with access to some

specialised insight or a special perspective, experience, characteristic or condition that he wished to understand (Yegidis and Weinbach 1996:122).

A total of 18 (Eighteen) participants were selected to participate in the study. Three (4) couples of the participants are still married, two (2) couples are separated, two (2) participant are separated, and two (3) are divorced. Each participant was sent and received an invitation to participate in the study. The invitation to participate contained a description of the research study, an explanation of why the participant was chosen, a request for permission to use an audio recorder, promise of anonymity regarding their replies, and a statement that participation was entirely optional. It further emphasized that participants might withdraw from the research at any moment without penalty (Maake 2017:39).

Participants answered questions from the Interview Schedule as part of a structured interview guide that was used to gather data. (Annexure D). They all responded to the questions listed on the Interview schedule.

The abbreviations "PAR1" and "PAR2" were used to identify the husband and wife in each pair, respectively.

For the purpose of this study, only participants whose marriages were solemnised in the Church were considered for selection. Purposive sampling was utilized in the selection process in place of a strict sample technique common in quantitative research. This is consistent with what Creswell (2012:212) accurately notes that "Purposive sampling is a qualitative sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon".

A purposeful sample is determined by the researcher based on the individual's appropriateness.

3.5.4 Inclusion criteria

Participants selected were members of the congregation who were married in the church and were still either married, separated, or divorced. Participants were chosen

because of their interest shown in the study. The kind of interest the researcher was looking for is the potential participants passion to partake in the study that could eventually ensure longevity of marriages in the community. Participants were able to understand the objective of the study because they comprehended English and were capable of signing the consent form. Grove and Cypher (2016:25) describe inclusion criteria as the researcher's standards that must be satisfied before a participant or element may be included in a sample. In a similar vein, Grove *et al.* (2013:353) define inclusion criteria as the qualities that a subject or element has to have in order to be classified as belonging to the intended community.

3.5.5 Exclusion criteria

The constraints that the researcher establishes to prevent individuals from being included in a sample are known as exclusion criteria (Grove and Cypher 2016:25). Exclusion criteria, according to Grove *et al.* (2013:353), are qualities that might cause someone or something to be omitted from the target population. Married couples who were regarded as having a stable relationship and had been married for more than 30 years were excluded from this research.

3.6 Research setting

Polit and Beck (2012:743) define a research setting as the physical site and circumstances in which data gathering occurs. The interviews, data collection and the documentation were carried out at the couples' homes. Please note that all COVID-19 protocols were observed at all times.

3.7 Data collection

Data collection is the process of gathering information to solve a research topic, according to Polit and Beck (2012:725). It entails the exact, methodical collection of data via techniques like participant observation, focus groups, interviews, and case studies on the research issue and its subproblems (Burns and Groves 2009:43). The majority of qualitative research uses methods for data collection that are either loosely organised or unstructured (Polit and Beck 2008:371). Data for this study were collected using a semi-structured, individual in-depth interview guide (Annexure D).

The researcher opted to use face-to-face interviews, observations, and spending time with participants for the purpose of data collection. An interview is defined as a conversation in which the purpose is to learn about the interviewee's point of view. In addition, Bloom and Crabtree (2006:317) propose that in-depth interviews are personal and intimate interactions that use open, direct, and conversational enquiries to develop detailed narratives and tales.

Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that entails conducting extensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to elicit their viewpoints on a certain idea, program, or issue. The benefits are discussed in the following sections.

3.7.1 Flexibility

Marshall and Rossman (1989) assert that flexibility enables research to roll, emerge, unravel, and cascade. As a result, the interviewer can investigate any topics they get interested in throughout the interview.

3.7.2 Participant perspective

By its very nature, an in-depth interview permits participants to build their own realities.

3.7.3 Higher response rate

Compared to other methods of data collecting, the person-to-person interaction that takes place during an interview yields a higher response rate. (Babbie 1989). According to Fossey *et al.* (2002:726), interviewing, focus groups, and participant observations are common methods of qualitative data collection. In this study, data was gathered solely through semi-structured interviews with couples, using an interviewing guide (Annexure D).

According to Holloway and Wheeler (1996:55), a semi-structured or focused interview uses questions from an interview guide to focus on the themes to be covered. Questions about each subject were asked open-endedly and at a moment that felt appropriate for each participant's narrative (Tutty *et al.* 1996:56). All interviews were done in English and digitally recorded with the participants' agreement. A provision was made that, in a case where there is an English language challenge, the

participant's home language could be used. However, this depended on as and when it was requested.

The researcher started the process of data collection by making contact with participants (couples in the congregation). First of all, the commencement meeting was arranged with the married couples on a relaxed Saturday afternoon at the church premises. During the meeting, the aim and objectives of the study were thoroughly explained to the couples by the researcher. The couples that could not attend the initial research study briefing were phoned and suitable dates and times were arranged and agreed upon. After the couples had been approached, a voluntary consent form was made available for signature (Annexure A). This gave potential participants confidence that the information discussed would remain confidential and that they would also be treated anonymously. Furthermore, participants were informed that this study was undertaken for academic purposes and to assist future members of the congregation on premarital counselling and marriage preparation processes. Permission was also sought from the couples to make use of audio-recording equipment during the course of the interviews. In addition, it was made clear to the couples that they had a right to withdraw from the study, should they decide not to participate any longer, for any reason, or to withdraw during the process, as it would not disadvantage the research study.

A total of 18 interviews with various couples were conducted at their homes, which were situated in different locations. The interviews, data collection and the documentation were carried out at the couples' homes. All interviews were recorded, analyzed, and compared in order to ensure consistency of the evidence.

The researcher employed the interviewing strategies outlined by Creswell (1994:71-74). During all of the interviews, the researcher made a conscious effort to create trust and rapport by asking only questions directly connected to the study. The researcher displayed attentive listening by using verbal signals to indicate interest. During the interview, feedback was provided through clarifying questions such as "Are you saying that ...?" and neutral but supportive statements like "Could you elaborate on that ...?" When the interview was about to end, participants were notified and invited to ask any questions they had.

3.8 Data collection procedure

The researcher began data collecting by contacting each participant individually. The goal of the visit was to invite the participants to participate in the study. Furthermore, the criteria for inclusion were discussed, and it was made clear to them that their involvement was entirely optional and that their privileges/rights would be unaffected. Those who accepted to participate in the study were given an explanation of the contents of the permission form's preamble. They were asked to sign the consent forms after confirming that they understood the contents of this letter. A convenient time and day were set for the follow-up appointment for the actual research interview.

Data was generally collected in English. The study was designed in such a way that any language spoken in a South African township could be used. Fortunately, all participants, who happen to be professionals, understood, and spoke English well. However in some instances some participants preferred to complete their sentences in their mother tongue in order to drive their points home effectively. At the initial stage when the participants were recruited to participate in the study, the objective of the study was thoroughly explained to them. At the researcher's request, participants signed an informed consent form, which explained the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. The researcher provided an explanation of the ethical considerations, including the assurance of anonymity and other pertinent information (see Annexure A). With the participants' permission, a digital voice recorder was utilized to record their replies. While taking field notes, the researcher also observed participant behaviour and nonverbal communication. Twenty people were to be interviewed at first, but since no new areas of interest surfaced, the saturation criterion was reached. Although one hour was anticipated for each interview, in reality, they lasted anywhere from 45 to 60 minutes.

3.9 Researcher as instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for gathering and analysing data, according to Spencer (2012:46). The researcher's facilitative role contributes to the development of a framework within which informants share valuable insights into their experiences and lives (Chenail 2011:255). One way to define the

researcher's role in data collecting is as a participant-observer. In this role, the researcher works closely with participants to get an insider's perspective while remaining objective (Gold, in De Vos *et al.* 1998:260). After being audio recorded, the interviews were typed down into English transcriptions. According to Holloway and Wheeler (1998:68), tape recording is the best approach for collecting interview data since it records all of the interview's words, including the questions, and subsequently lowers the possibility that important issues would be overlooked. Additionally, this technique allows researchers to keep eye contact and interact with individuals fully.

3.10 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of looking for patterns in items or behaviours that are repeated within a subject of study, according to Neuman (2000:426). Marshall and Rossman (1989:150) contribute that data analysis entails organising, structuring, and analysing the gathered data are all part of data analysis. According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:399), the approach of data analysis in qualitative research requires inductive reasoning during and after data collection. Data collection can be completed when the data becomes repetitive and saturated (Schurink in De Vos *et al.*, 1998:304). After the digitally recorded interviews were translated into English, transcribers thoroughly checked the resulting transcripts.

3.10.1 Organising data

It is important to note that most researchers arrange their data into computer files, according to Creswell (2013:182). Apart from organising files, researchers often use computers or manually break down their files into appropriate textual units, such as a word, a phrase, or the full narrative, for various types of analysis. The data was democratised by the researcher's reviewing of interview notes on which data had been collected. If different sources of data were consulted, then it meant that the data had to be pulled together and structured in order to be analyzed. The digital recordings that meet the definition of "data" were transcribed into written form and entered into Microsoft Word as text files.

Creswell (2013:182) said that regularly, researchers compartmentalize their data in electronic folders, and in doing so, they convert the files into relevant textual segments,

for example, a word, sentence and even a whole story which can be analyzed manually or by use of a machine. Every interview was recorded in its own file and tagged using a given transcript code. Beforehand, the analyst utilized the opportunity to analyze every recording (Maxwell, 2013:105). Thereafter, the researcher took notes while transcribing important words, phrases, and remarks in order to identify themes and sub-themes. Each interview's notes and transcripts were arranged into electronic folders. The interview files were accordingly dated.

3.10.2 Reading and memoing

Creswell (2013:183) states that researchers who continue their analysis beyond individual cases often start with understanding the entire dataset. Memoing, according to Streubert and Carpenter (2011:128), consists of the researcher's jottings that help capture his ideas on the data, also on emerging the theoretical codes and their relationship among codes. In the study, the researcher handpicked three transcripts and repeatedly went through the documents while listening to audio recordings associated with each script. This was done so as to get the root of facts, comprehend what the data means based on what it implies and figure out how these pieces of information connect with the researcher's question. In order to discover possible developing themes, data was manually examined, analyzed, and reflecting comments were written as memos in the left side margins of interview transcripts.

The researcher went through all the transcripts, reading them three times while paying attention to the audio recording that came with the transcript to capture the information; that is, to understand what the data means and how it relates to his research questions. This was done at least three times for each transcript.

3.10.3 Describing, classifying and interpreting data into codes and themes

According to Creswell (2013:184), the research at this point, builds long, differentiated, even perhaps nuanced descriptions develop topics or dimensions as well provides interpretation based on the point of view or the view of other people or what is written about some topics or phenomena. Data were first sorted, coded and explanations provided by the researcher. The information was split into pieces, and each was put down on a paper dedicated to a certain category. Moreover, similar elements were

grouped together, deriving eight themes (cf. 4.1) which were ultimately utilized to compose the story.

In addition, the data collected from field notes and interviews were categorised and organised by the researcher into themes and sub-themes (cf. 4.7). Participants' own words and concepts in this case became the basis for deriving themes, which Maxwell (2013:108) defines as "emic" categories that are used to depict the meanings and understandings shared by participants. In the study, the researcher grouped categories that carried resemblance in meanings to each other before identifying sub-themes which were then classified into wider themes.

The next step was to give thorough descriptions of the setting, the participants, and the categories or topics that would be the subject of the analysis. The researcher then went on to convey the analysis's findings through a narrative text presentation of the outcomes.

Creswell (2013:184) indicates that this research stage involves detailed description building, theme and dimensional development, and extension based on personal opinions or opinions obtained from the literature.

3.10.4 Interpreting the data

According to Creswell (2013:184), analysis results are interpreted by researchers for understanding the specific data which they carry out through development codes; formulation themes after identification codes, and then organizing into high-level abstraction units about guesses, penetration, and intuition before testing ideas by prior knowledge. After coding the information would be summarized whereas comparison made between codes as well data so establish links between various sections; while consolidating themes leading to construction of meaning.

3.11 Data verification/measures to ensure trustworthiness

Guba's model (Krefting 1991:214-222) to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative data was applied. The researcher opted for the model, as it has the following four

characteristics that ensure trustworthiness, namely truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. These characteristics are explained below:

3.11.1 Truth-value

The term “truth-value” refers to the researcher's confidence in the accuracy of their findings, taking into account the research methodology, informants, and context.

The study's findings should accurately reflect the participants' experiences (Krefting 1991:215). The credibility strategy determines truth-value. In this study, the researcher applied the following criteria:

3.11.1.1 Interviewing techniques

The researcher employed various interviewing techniques that include probing, verbal and non-verbal expressions, restatements and summarizing for purposes of making the study more credible.

3.11.1.2 Triangulation

Krefting (1991:219) describes triangulation, as the practice of comparing numerous perspectives through diverse methods of data acquisition. This study employed triangulation methodology in order to obtain data from three groups of people: married couples who have their partners with them or not; those who are separated but have not yet divorced officially; as well as those who are divorced.

3.11.1.3 Peer examination

The researcher sought input from colleagues who are well-versed with qualitative research became a key source of clarification and suggestions during the study period. It has been profitable method according to Krefting (1991:219). The research was guided by the researcher's study leader, who is an skilled qualitative researcher in their own right. In order to further enhance the credibility of the research, the transcribed interviews of the researcher in Setswana with the accompanying translations in English were sent to an academic well versed with the Setswana language to scrutinize if the English translations were indeed a true reflection of the intended message in Setswana. A Unisa supervisor was also able to evaluate the research methods utilized in the study. Furthermore, participants were asked during

the recording of the interview to verify if their comments accurately reflected their intentions.

3.11.1.4 Authority of the researcher

The researcher has been in senior leadership roles in the business sector and has served as an ordained Minister of the Word for the last five years. He is a senior manager at his current workplace. His official duties as the Minister of the Word entails the following, according the URCSA Church Order (2015:17):

- Proclaiming the Word of God and the ministry of prayer;
- Administering the sacraments;
- Conducting worship services;
- Assuming accountability for teaching catechetical subjects; Proclaiming public declarations of faith;
- Managing the congregation's discipline and administration in conjunction with the Church Council;
- Adequate home visits and congregational pastoral care;
- Equipping Christians for ministry, including specific office holders and prospective leaders in the church.;
- Reaching out to Reaching out to non-Christians and non-churchgoers; and
- Christian consecration of marriages.

3.11.2 Applicability

Krefting (1991:216) defines applicability is the extent to which the findings may be relevant in different settings or with different groups of people. Applicability is demonstrated by using the technique called transferability. So in order to make sure that the research method could be transferred to others, its detailed description was given by the researcher.

3.11.3 Consistency

Consistency is the extent to which findings would persist if a study was repeated involving the same participants or under comparable circumstances (Guba, as cited in Krefting 1991:216). Dependability was used to judge whether this was the case and it was assured by involving another person in coding. The researcher and the

independent coder did their coding separately. Later, they had a consensus meeting with the study leader on the themes, sub-themes, and categories they would present as findings.

3.11.4 Neutrality

Neutrality is the fourth criterion, indicating to the extent to which the study findings are free from bias. Guba's model (Krefting 1991:216-217) proposes that suggests in qualitative studies, neutrality should be based on judges of data rather than on those of the researcher since confirmability serves neutrality Thus, the objective here was to be neutral through triangulation.

3.12 Ethics considerations

The ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects discussed below served as the study's compass.

3.12.1 Protecting the rights of the institution

3.12.1.1 Permission to conduct the study

The Unisa Higher Degrees Ethical Committee granted authorization to conduct the research (see Annexure G). The request for the study was sent to the Church Council (Annexure B).

3.12.2 Scientific integrity of the research

Grove *et al.* (2013:188) stress the significance of upholding honesty by refraining from copying other people's work and refraining from unethical behaviour such fabrication, falsification, dishonesty, or plagiarism. They contend that it is the responsibility of researchers to follow research procedures and present their findings in a reliable way (Grove *et al.*, 2013:188).

3.12.3 Protecting the rights of the participants

3.12.3.1 Confidentiality

Ensuring that research participants' data is never disclosed to third parties is a crucial aspect of maintaining confidentiality (Polit and Beck 2008:750). It also alludes to the duty of the researcher to manage confidential information provided by the subject in a

way that prohibits sharing without consent (Burns and Grove 2009:213). The information collected and the participants were protected from public viewing and unwanted access. As a result, data was kept private from anyone who wasn't explicitly and directly involved in the research. Participants received assurances that their data would be maintained securely and were told about who would have access to it.

3.12.3.2 Informed consent

Informed consent is an ethical guideline that requires researchers to acquire people' voluntary involvement only after fully disclosing all possible risks and benefits of their participation in the study (Polit and Beck 2012:730). Before the interviews began, participants were requested to sign written informed consent forms (see Annexure A). Additionally, individuals were told orally that they might leave the research at any moment and that participation was not mandatory.

3.12.3.3 Protecting the rights to privacy

According to Grove *et al.* (2013:169), privacy is an individual's right to decide when, how much, and under what broad conditions information is shared with others or not. Before taking part in the study, individuals were asked to give their consent. Participants were interviewed in a separate room to ensure their comfort.

3.12.3.4 Anonymity

To guarantee that participants cannot be recognised in published material, anonymity is achieved by employing pseudonyms instead of their real identities (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:101). According to Babbie (2012:65), research achieves anonymity when neither the investigator nor the findings' readers are able to connect a particular response to a specific respondent. Participants in this study were given numbers, such as Participant 11, to protect their identities. Participants received notification that the thesis would not reveal their names or any other personal information. As a result, findings are released and presented in an anonymous manner.

3.12.3.5 Voluntary participation and the right to withdrawal

As Klenke (2008:50) stipulated, voluntary participation entails that individuals are not forced to participate in the study and are free to leave at any moment without incurring any penalties. In correlation, the participants in this study gave their informed consent

and were given the freedom to withdraw from the research at any moment if they changed their minds. The permission form explicitly noted the right to withdraw and addressed verbally with the participants.

3.12.3.6 Autonomy

According to Macnee and McCabe (2008), autonomy in research is a basic ethical value that upholds the right to informed consent as well as the freedom of self-determination. It also entails honouring each person's natural independence and dignity (Welfes 2015:42). As such, participants were made aware of their freedom to decline participation in the study.

3.12.3.7 Beneficence

Benevolence is defined by Polit and Beck (2008:748) as a basic ethical precept that aims to maximise research participants' advantages while minimising their damage. The investigator evaluated the kind, degree, and scope of dangers that the research subjects encountered (Grove *et al.* 2013:176). The interviews were conducted at the homes of the participants in order to reduce any transient discomfort. Furthermore, the investigator made certain that the subjects were aware of the type of questions they would be asked.

3.12.3.8 Veracity

Moule and Goodman (2009:57) define honesty as the moral standard of telling the truth. The investigator ensured veracity by establishing trusting connections with the participants, and therefore, participants were also given accurate and truthful information.

3.12.3.9 Fidelity

Welfes (2015:47) asserts that faithfulness involves being sincere and honouring commitments. The researcher demonstrated this by refraining from disputing the participants' statements or showing any signs of fatigue during the interviews, thereby prioritizing the participants' interests over his own. Adhering to the guidelines in the consent forms further reflected the researcher's commitment to both the participants and the larger congregation.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design, sample and sampling methodologies, recruitment strategies, instrumentation, data collection process, and data analysis. The participants' data was gathered utilising a qualitative research technique. The chapter concludes with suggestions for increasing the study's credibility and an overview of ethical considerations. The fieldwork report (empirical portion) will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT ON THE FIELDWORK – EMPIRICAL REPORT

4.1 Introduction

As part of the practical theological hermeneutical interpretation process, this chapter uses Osmer's (2008:7) interpretative task from his second inquiry, "Why is this happening?" to present the evidence gathered from participants. The chapter also includes reports on the research's empirical component, which includes participant interviews. The questions from the interview schedule are followed in order as the findings are presented narratively. The researcher analyzed the interview data to assess the present status of marriage preparation within the URCSA congregation where the study was performed. Verbatim quotation of what each participant said about their understanding and views on premarital counselling are presented on Annexure I. The main research question that was identified in Chapter 1 is: How can a URCSA congregation contribute to facilitate sustainable marriage partnerships among its members through a premarital preparation process/programme that assists to:

- Prepare black couples for a married life;
- Build their confidence to enter married life; and
- Provide marriage skills?

The eight (8) challenges and findings from the empirical investigation that will be given particular consideration are listed below:

- Conflict management and challenges;
- Family versus extended family;
- Developing vision and mission for the family;
- Financial matters;
- Intimacy issues and family planning;
- Communication management in marriage and/or lack thereof.
- Understanding or lack of understanding of premarital counselling challenges by participants;

- The role the Church played, challenges and its effectiveness;
- The importance of the premarital counselling to be considered.

As stated in Chapter 3, data was collected from the sampled population group of married, separated, and divorced couples. During the interviews, it became clear that most of the participants experienced marital challenges due to a lack of premarital counselling being offered or not by the Church. Interestingly, the majority of participants said that they would have preferred to have had premarital therapy. Unfortunately, it was never offered as there is nothing currently in place. The researcher noted several common and comparable responses from many gatherings

To achieve the goal of this chapter, the researcher studied each of the themes and sub-themes that developed from the interview (see 4.7), as well as possible solutions to these challenges.

The chapter will conclude with recommendations for literature on topics related to assisting couples in strengthening their marriages, including the importance of successful pre-marital and marriage counselling programs. This will assist to solve the research problem stated in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.4.1).

4.2 Participants' breakdown

One of the first questions in the data collection was to establish the gender of the participants. A total of eighteen (N=18) participants were interviewed and they were distinguished by giving each one a number, that is, from Participant 1 to Participant 18.

Figure 4 below shows the responses to the question: what is your gender? The males were n=7 (39%) and females participants were n=11(61%) in total. This breakdown is made up of the total number of 18 participants invited into the study.

What is Your Gender

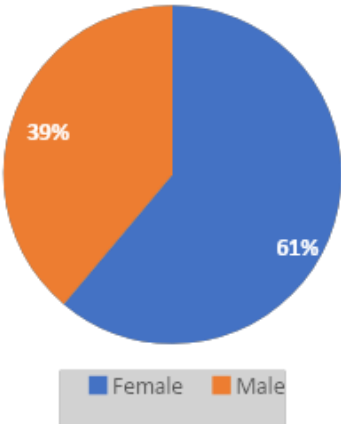


Figure 4: Responses to the question: What is your Gender? (n=18)

Figure 5 below depicts participants years in marriage. This is calculated before separation or divorce in the case of those separated or divorced. This figure 2 below does not give exact years but places their years of marriage in terms of categories. For example, those married less than five (5) years and or above five (5) and ten (10) years in marriage. Their exact number of marriage is capture in their short biographies after this section below.

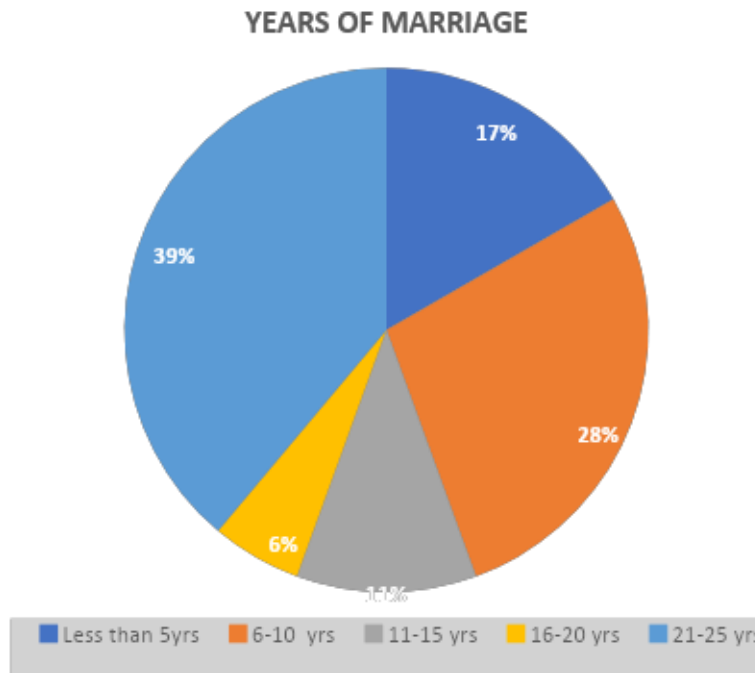


Figure 5: Response to the question: How many years have you been married?
(n=18)

4.3 Biographical profile of participants

4.3.1 Participants one (1) and two (2)

Both participants lead a professional life and have been married for fourteen (14) years. They have two children (boys). They met through a cousin of the wife, who played a huge role in ensuring that they were a future couple. Their friendship lasted for two years before they started dating. They are a dedicated couple and parents who want to make their marriage successful as they both came from broken families/marriages and would not like their children to go through their experiences of growing up without both parents.

4.3.2 Participants three (3) and four (4)

They met while she was at high school. At that time, she was a learner and he had just entered the job market as a junior educator. They dated for seven years before they got married. She had big dreams and visions about the marriage, but unfortunately all did not go as planned. They have been married for 22 years and blessed with two children, a boy and a girl. Currently they are separated but not yet divorced.

4.3.3 Participants five (5) and six (6)

The couple met while they were at secondary school. She was in Form 1 (Grade 8) and he was in Form 3 (Grade 10). In 1985 there was a national strike and boycotts of schools that led to schools being closed by the government. In that year they did not write their exams. Both were sport fanatics and he introduced her to basketball. They dated and by the time she was in Matric, she fell pregnant and when she wrote Matric exams she was already expecting a baby but unaware of it. Following customary procedures, he paid the lobola and they were married. They have two kids, a girl and a boy, and two grandchildren after 25 years of marriage.

4.3.4 Participant seven (7)

Participant seven (7) met with the partner at university and dated for a short period of time. They dated from 2002 and got married in 2003. They worked together for the same employer up to date. They separated in 2008 and divorced in 2011. Both had a child of their own whom they brought into the marriage, and they were blessed in the marriage with one child.

4.3.5 Participant eight (8)

Participant eight (8) was married for twenty (22) years, but is currently not living with her husband since they have been separated for seven years and have not yet legally divorced. They are blessed with two children: a boy and a girl. They met at an event, and they dated for one year before they got married. She wanted to get married in a respectable marriage. Unfortunately, their relationship did not work out.

4.3.6 Participants nine (9) and ten (10)

The couple met in 1990 in a township of Pretoria while they were playing for a volleyball team. In 1991 they were both invited to a party in one of the townships in Pretoria by a cousin of the husband, where they started talking. They started dating then and got married customarily in 2000. In 2002 they celebrated in Western style. They are blessed with three children (two girls and one boy). They recently adopted the daughter of their cousin-sister, after she had passed away.

4.3.7 Participant eleven (11)

Currently divorced but was married for twenty (20) years and blessed with four (4) children [two(2) boys and two(2) girls]. She grew up in the context in which gender-based violence was common. As a result, her dream partner would be someone who despised liquor and not someone naughty or who is abusive. She was looking for a person with a vision. She got what she wanted but did work hard to protect it. She got into marriage with no understanding what she was getting herself into. She still thinks she did put up a good fight to protect her marriage due to lack of information and expected things to work out.

4.3.8 Participant twelve (12) and thirteen (13)

They have been married for 6 years. They met 8 years ago and dated for 2 years before the husband proposed to marry her. They are blessed with two (2) children, a boy and a girl. They met through a friend who introduced him to her. They had a lot in common, for example, they enjoyed going to church and were committed Christians. The husband was recently retrenched and is looking for a job. Fortunately, the wife is still working and that assists with the household expenses. They are both committed in the Church, but they are of the opinion that the church could have done better to prepare for the longevity of their marriage.

4.3.9 Participant fourteen (14) and fifteen (15)

The woman was in her mid-twenties and the man was in his late twenties when they were married. Their relationship was happy at first, but eventually issues developed because of poor communication. The husband saw that his wife's attitude was negative and that she did not value him as her husband. The husband blames his wife for not caring for him and this has led to the situation where his wife decided not to share a bed with him again and their relationship is strained. He is of opinion that premarital counselling could have assisted.

4.3.10 Participant sixteen (16) and seventeen (17)

The couple got married when they were in their early twenties (20's). They did not get premarital therapy from the Church, but within the context of their cultural heritage instead. The Church only assisted with the blessing of rings and the marriage. In the process of the traditional counselling, the counselling team consisted of relatives

(uncles and aunts from the side of both husband and wife). Their relationship was pleasant at first, but due to the influence of some of her family members, issues emerged in their marriage. His wife forced him to replicate other couples' behaviour and requested expensive clothes be purchased for her. Due to this influence and extended family continuing interference their marriage is not very nice lately. The couple needs some assistance and opines that may be premarital counselling at the Church would have assisted.

4.3.11 Participant eighteen (18)

A committed Christian who divorced from her husband just two years after they celebrated their wedding. They met at school before he joined the army. The husband was in his late 20s when they got married. They are originally from Northwest Province but relocated to Pretoria before they celebrated their wedding. In the early days in Pretoria their related well, but problems started when the husband started having a number of new friends. He started going to weekend parties and before long he was coming home late at night or in the early hours on the morning. He stopped accompanying her to church services. At the end she lost him to someone else.

Table 2: Profile of participants

Allocated number	Race	Age	Gender	Marriage Status	Occupation
Participant Number 1	African	58	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 2	African	56	Female	Married	Manager
Participant Number 3	African	59	Male	Separated	Teacher
Participant Number 4	African	48	Female	Separated	Unemployed
Participant Number 5	African	45	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 6	African	39	Female	Married	Manager
Participant Number 7	African	56	Female	Divorced	Director
Participant Number 8	African	52	Female	Separated	Manager
Participant Number 9	African	53	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 10	African	50	Female	Married	Manager
Participant Number 11	African	50	Female	Married	HOD
Participant Number 12	African	30	Male	Married	Unemployed
Participant Number 13	African	25	Female	Married	Teacher
Participant Number 14	African	33	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 15	African	28	Female	Married	Teacher
Participant Number 16	African	35	Male	Separated	Teacher
Participant Number 17	African	33	Female	Separated	Unemployed
Participant Number 18	African	28	Male	Divorced	Clerk

Table 2 provides information relating to the age and ethnicity of the participants. It also gives information about their marital status and employments.

4.3.12 Analysis of field notes and response to other questions

Figure 6 below provides an answer to the question: How would you describe the start of your marital journey? Participants who responded to this question were n=18 in total. Based on the responses, one can assume that the start of the marital journey was very well and did promise the kind of longevity needed in marriage. Though 17% of the participants said it was good, it still points to the fact that start was an enjoyable one. In the following questions however, participants indicated drastic changes in their marital experience which made the union to be very unpleasant for some among the participants.

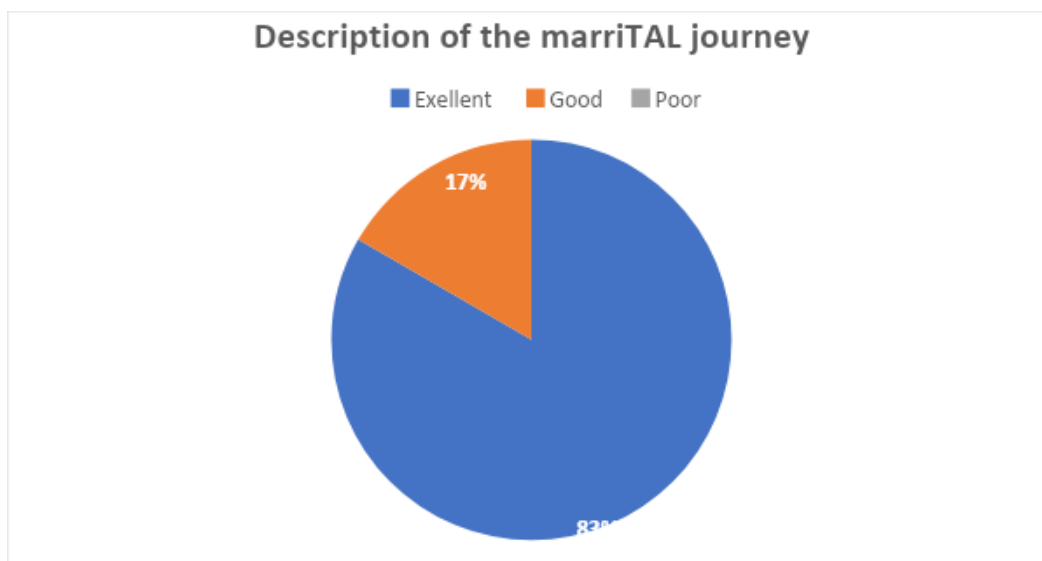


Figure 6: Response to the question: How would you describe the start of your marital journey? (n=18)

Figure 7 below shows the description of marital journey years after. It does so by responding to the question: What could have been the contributor to where marriage is now? A total number of (n=18) responded and the figure below only shows summary of the major problem in terms of themes. N=7 (39%) participants talked about communication as the biggest challenge, while n=6 (33%) shows interference from extended family members as problematic in marriage.

Contributors to marital challenges

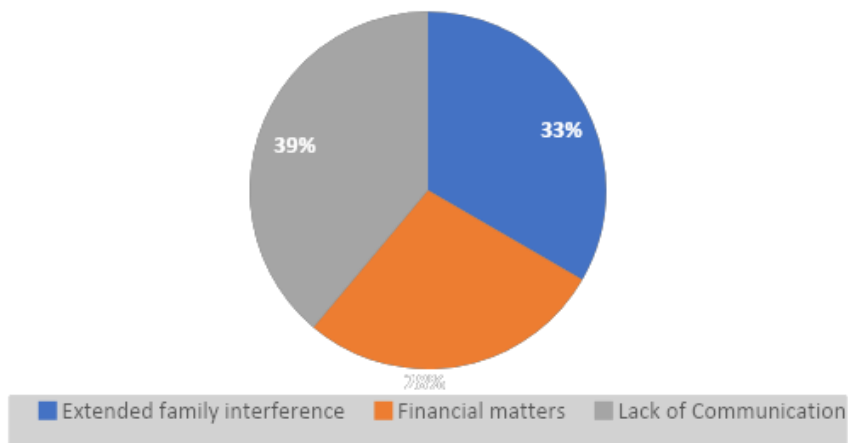


Figure 7: Responses to the question: What could have been the contributor to where marriage is now? (n=18)

Figure 8 below shows a response to the question of whether the premarital counselling extended its effectiveness. All n=18 participants did participate on this question and their responses are captured below. Of the n=18 participants, a total n=15 (83%) was not happy with the kind of premarital counselling received, while n=3 (17%) were unsure whether there was positive impact.

Effectiveness of premarital counseling

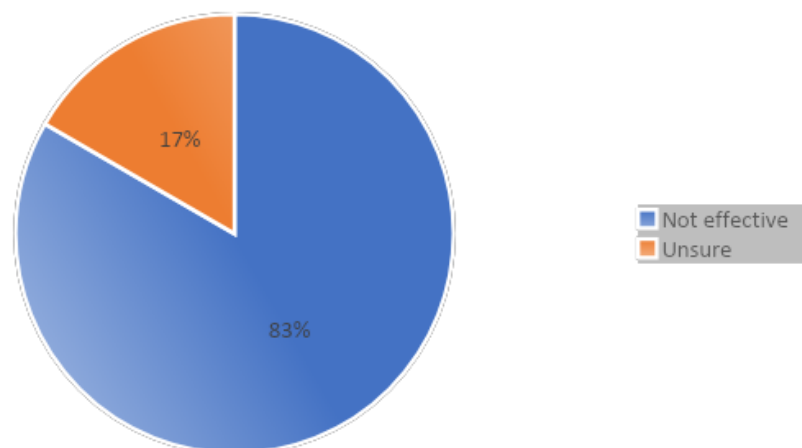


Figure 8: Response to the question: How would you describe the kind of premarital counselling and the effect it had in your marriage? (n=18)

In an interview with participant 17, they cited that:

One the main reasons I am not sure is this premarital counselling did an effective job or not, one was never prepared to deal with complicated issues in family. When your elders only tell you how and when to respect your man/husband, it is not enough. Then you must deal with silence in your own matrimonial house.

Participant 7 has indicated has also indicated that following during an interview:

The role premarital counselling should help us find ways or navigate direction to the future by being able to resolve the challenges in the house. But it becomes difficult of the other person is not willing to listen and even talk to you.

This in my view, shows the difficulties that are there in lack of communication in marriage and the danger this carries. Marital longevity is built based on sound understanding and willingness to communicate in attempt to resolve the hiccups that exists in marriage. Therefore, communication appears to be the less emphasizes key issue in their premarital counselling resulting in them not understanding where the premarital counselling they received was successful or not.

4.4 Realities and challenges of couples

After interviewing the participants about premarital preparation process within their congregation, the researcher discovered that married couples would have liked to be counselled before they got married. Besides collecting data from the participants with the structured interview guide, the researcher was a participant observer during the study. The researcher noted certain consistent replies in all of the interviews. The participants expressed their appreciation for the project and stated that the research will be extremely beneficial to the church. Most of them are parents today and would mostly like their children not to go through their experiences. In this section the researcher presents the interpretation of the situation as it came out of the interviews with participants under the following heading: church council support, creating awareness about marriage from Sunday school level, pastoral care in the church, marriage enrichment programmes, couple ministry, support groups within the congregation, spiritual and physical needs, and support in adjusting to marriage journey.

4.4.1 Church Council support

The majority of the participant testified that the church indeed did not do enough to prepare them thoroughly for the marriage journey. Some indicated that may be if they were prepared well from the beginning, some of the marriage potholes could have been avoided. On the issue of dealing with conflict and communication, for example, participants indicated that if the church thought about its importance, they would have dealt with this challenge in a better way. Some said that maybe their marriages would have been saved had the church provided the support from the start of the marriage journey. The participants indicated that they lacked the support in their Church Council, making it difficult for the couples to cope with marriage challenges. Support is important as it enables one to cope with any challenge and change management. A lack of support causes emotional pain and puts unnecessary physical strain on couples.

4.4.2 Creating awareness about marriage

Other participants interviewed indicated that there was a need for the church to create awareness about marriage. There are couples that have been married for over 40 years in the congregation and participants think these are relevant members to share their marriage experiences in order to create awareness about marriage and how it works, what can be avoided and how it can be spiced up to work better. According to participants, there are lots of lessons that can be learnt from the elderly in the congregation that manage to stay marrieds even though their marriages went through storms and challenges.

4.4.3 Pastoral care and counselling

The majority of participants in the interviews expressed a lack of pastoral care, support, and counselling within the church. Participants had a lot of respect for the church leadership and elders, but they failed to offer pastoral care and counselling. They failed to impart their experience, lacked skills, and involving of church members in the care and counselling of couples was very poor. The researcher, as an ordained Minister within the URCSA, agrees and is of the opinion that a lot needs to be done in this area.

4.4.4 Marriage enrichment

During the interviews with participants, the researcher discovered that there was a plea and need for marriage enrichment programmes in the congregation. In the first year of ordination, the researcher arranged a marriage enrichment seminar that was well attended by many married couples in the congregation. During the interviews, couples that attended the first marriage enrichment seminar indicated that this should be revived and be held twice a year.

4.4.5 Couple ministry

Many couples indicated during the interviews that there is a need for Couple Ministry in the congregation, much as there is Man Ministry, Woman Ministry and Youth Ministry. One participant even suggested that married couples should be allowed to sit together during the church service in order to make the marriage fashionable and acceptable in the church community. Couples should be offered space and chance within the congregation calendar.

4.4.6 Marriage support groups within the congregation

One participant suggested that the congregation should establish marriage support groups in the congregation. The couples should be provided to congregants of their own as a group where they would be able to share their experiences and how they navigated along. According to the participants, that would provide an opportunity to learn from each other and not to repeat the same mistake the other couples made.

4.4.7 Spiritual and physical needs

In order to build marriages that last and avoid marriage failures, most of the participants indicated that the church must support both their spiritual and physical needs. Participants stated that much as they get sermons every Sunday, they however need words that are relevant to the context. The church fell short in encouraging and indicating health and wellness programmes for couples. The church should also be teaching about health issues, like the effects of menopause, diabetes, and prostate cancer - all the health issues at married couples could experience at a stage.

4.4.8 Proper support in adjusting to marriage

One of the participants indicated that after the church has done the paperwork of marrying, it is like the church dumps them and leaves them on their own. There are no post-marital visits to check on the newly wed couples to find out how they are coping and adjusting to the marriage journey. Couples are thrown into the deep end and must see it through.

4.5 Representing and visualising data

Representing and visualising data is the last stage of the spiral, where the researcher provides the data, according to Creswell (2013:187). First-hand testimonies from the couples who took part in the study served as a shortened version of the study's integrated findings, which were presented in narrative portions.

The researcher manually coded the data in accordance with Saldana's (2009:22) model, producing the themes that are discussed in the next section.

4.6 Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews.

Themes are the primary topics or concepts explored or described in a piece of writing (Merriam Webster Unbridged Dictionary 2015:108). In this study, themes were identified by gathering participant experiences. The following themes were identified as per challenges couples faced:

1. Conflict management and challenges;
2. Family versus extended family;
3. Developing vision and mission for the family;
4. Failure to agree on Financial matters;
5. Lack of Intimacy and family planning; (in the context of Belhar, justice is advocated and promoted. This justice is not limited to the issues of race and racism but goes beyond that. In the context of this research, couple have a responsibility to satisfy each other's sexual needs. Failure leads to injustice to the next person.
6. Communication management in marriage and/or lack thereof. (the oneness in marriage implies that couples should in a way be able to cultivate skills on and

about communication on anything in marriage. This also means unity in marriage. It provides an opportunity for couple to be able to address anything that might occur as a stumbling block for marital longevity. In other words, this requires deeper understanding of unity and what this entails for the institution of marriage.

7. The role the Church played, challenges and its effectiveness and the importance of the premarital counselling to be considered.
8. Understanding or lack of understanding of premarital counselling challenges by participants;

4.7 Summary of interview responses

A summary of identified themes and sub-themes follows:

Table 3: Summary of the identified themes and sub-themes

Themes	Participants	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. Conflict management	18	16	2	0
2. Family versus extended family	18	17	1	0
3. Developing vision and mission for the family	18	18	0	0
4. Financial matters	18	18	0	0
5. Intimacy issues and family planning	18	15	2	1
6. Communication management and/ or lack thereof	18	18	0	0
7. The role the church played and its effectiveness and	18	17	1	0

understanding of premarital counselling				
8. Understanding or lack of understanding of premarital counselling challenges	18	16	2	0

4.7.1 Theme 1: Conflict management

Out of 18 participants, 16 (88,8%) indicated that the Church did not expose them effectively on how to manage conflict in marriage union. While two (2) participants, (11,1%) were neutral on the matter.

In response to the questions 6,7,10 and 13 in the interview schedule one participants stated that “My wife explained that sometimes you need to weigh the problem, and both cannot be at 100% all the time. So, we must always reach a compromise.”

Supporting him, Participant 2 said the following:

We had our hurtful patches and again I had a very good support system from my parents. My mother is a very strong person and if I went to her and said that’s it. There was a time where I wanted nothing to do with my husband at all when we were still living in Khutsong to the extent that I nearly packed up and went back home. I did not want anything to do with him. But fortunately, my Mom intervened.

Every relationship has its own challenges and ups and downs. During the interviews, when participants were asked how they handled challenges and conflict, they responded in many interesting ways. There is a Venda proverb that *vhathu ndi nanga dza kholomo vha a kudana*, which means “wherever there are people, there is always the possibility of some disagreements, and so on.” Disagreement may result from a husband and wife's distrustful attitude (Nwoye 2000:81). For instance, if her spouse does not continue to have a love connection with her, she could believe that he is seeing someone else. According to Nascimento (2001:68–69), a lack of mutual respect and trust might be the root of conflict in certain couples (Hoff, 2002:112-113).

Couples must put a lot of effort into creating the habit of respecting one another because respect breeds unconditional love, which is necessary for marital peace (Hoff, 2002:155-156). Couples cannot overcome marital conflicts unless they realise that marriage involves a great deal of responsibilities which entails unconditional commitment to a relationship on a social, sexual, and spiritual level is a sign of responsibility (Matequele 2019:51). This will lead to faithfulness, trust, love, and harmony as characteristics predominant in the partnership (Grenz and Smith, 2005:23). Of all human relationships, marriage is the most personal and demands total loyalty from both the husband and the wife. Couples should learn how to set aside selfishness and settle problems amicably by learning to express their emotions in a regulated and productive way (Hoff, 2002:113-115).

Louw (2012:90) highlights the role that intellect plays in resolving conflicts within a marriage. When a couple is experiencing conflict, it's normal for them to start to harbour negatively thoughts and feelings about their union and each other (Matequele 2019:51). Matequele (2019:51) articulates succinctly that spouses and husbands need help altering their pessimistic thought patterns. Even in Christian relationships, this process requires certain skills, such forgiveness and reconciliation (Louw, 2012:91–92; Reifler, 2007:154). Mashau (2016b:107) continues to argue that:

Many marriages fail due to issues that the pair is unable to resolve. The reality of challenges and conflicts in marriages necessitates that persons preparing for marriage be taught conflict resolution skills (Mashau 2016b:107).

Annexure I contains verbatim quotes from each participant expressing their opinions and comprehension of premarital counselling.

4.7.2 Theme 2: Family and extended family/relatives

Out of 18 participants, 17 (94%) indicated that the Church did not do provide good guidance to deal with family, extended family, and friends. While one (1) participant, (6%) was neutral on the matter.

In response to the questions 6,7,10 and 13 in the interview schedule this is some of the participants responses.

Participant 4 expressed that:

Our family members see us a people that have money only because we plan wisely, me and my husband. So, challenges would be to ask money from us, left, right and centre. I think the one thing I will never do is to refuse them money. Whatever little thing we have we share. In a nutshell di family members are our biggest challenge. 90% is family members and I think if people can be made aware of the in-laws, just to be aware of what they will go through, not that they hate us but to better prepare us.

Participant 3 stated:

You, one thing in the Bible that is used more often but in reality, it is not an easy thing. The Bible says a man would therefore leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh. That makes sense but it does not need to be explained and it's straightforward. But it is not an easy thing especially in the black culture. You cannot detach. Not to say detach. I think most of us, especially in the black community where before you start your life, you start assisting back at home where your parents, where they could not make it.

Participants' responses revealed many other things, and in the researcher's opinion these were just symptoms and there were others, if not many root causes. The fact that the Church did not offer premarital counselling to couples intending to get married made them very vulnerable to many other challenges. Especially when considering how engaged couples in our communities, particularly those in townships, spend more time getting ready for the big day than they do preparing for their married life. Most of the time and energies are directed to choosing wedding gowns, buying of rings, choosing wedding clothes, wedding venues, decorations, catering, after parties and music. At this point no one thinks about post the wedding day and couples adopt the attitude of *Re tla bona koo pele* ("We will cross the bridge when we get to it"). Many participants indicated that they had no clue what they were getting themselves in to and later faced many difficulties only when they were in the marriage. Some participants indicated that they had no plan, vision of mission for the marriage. The roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined from the onset.

One participant said:

I think career pathing should be touched when couples are counselled. So couples must be told about life after wedding celebration. So when they get into marriage they must have a vision. Ministers have ideas and need to make people aware about these things. Because as soon as children are born in marriage, things will start changing, so a person needs to upgrade to meet the standard of living going forward. So you need to guide them gradually you need to upgrade yourself, for example a loaf of bread is R10 today and after two years it will be R20, the question is will you be able to afford it? If you cannot afford it, that's when conflict starts. So if they get an idea of what they get themselves and think of tomorrow and of the need to upgrade themselves.

One participant put it this way

We did not know better, if we had something to compare with, we would have been more exposed. We were that couple that felt disadvantaged because in our circles another couple went for counselling privately. It was about the era that we were in, many things came to light.

Relatives or extended family can be regarded as external pressure. According to Mashau (2016a:140) there is a tendency of relatives to want to come and stay with the newlywed couple. Mashau (2016a:150) posits this can lead to several problems at times that could include finance and control over the family. These could lead the couple to argue that they spend the money of the money of their brother or sister, depending from whose side the family member comes from. Some of these relatives may even be rude to either the wife or the brother (Mashau 2016a:150). It's a common belief that when Africans tie the knot, friends and family on both sides of the couple should act as advisors and counsel the married couple and help with decision-making throughout the marriage. It is believed that marriage comprises more than just two people, as the extended are allowed to have a say in decisions made by the married couple (Baloyi 2014:23).

Some marriage issues may occur as a result of incorrect counsel from extended family members. According to Mashau (2016a:155), parental and extended family intervention frequently results in more conflict than problem resolution. He continues

his argument by stating that the extended family should only get involved when the married couple asks for assistance in certain circumstances(Mashau, 2016a:155).

Like Mashau (2016a:155), Baloyi (2014:19) believes that it is troublesome for extended family members to intervene in family disputes. He also contends that the church should teach its members to stay out of family issues unless they have been asked and granted an opportunity to do so.

Annexure I contains verbatim quotations from each participant about their understanding and thoughts on premarital therapy.

4.7.3 Theme 3: Developing vision and mission for the family

Out of 18 participants, 18 (100%) indicated that the Church did not assist and guide them to develop visions and mission for their families.

It was revealed to the researcher by the participants that they did not develop and establish both mission and vision for their marriages. In relation to developing the vision for marriage and family participant 4 said:

I don't think so, as I am saying going back, if we were taught some things and maybe if he had a father figure in his life, because most of the marriages are going to fail especially if those kids were not raised by their fathers because there are things that your father needs to teach you. There are so many mistakes that I am seeing that if he had a father, he would know that 1, 2, 3 I must not do. A father figure plays an important role in a man's life.

The other participant put it this way:

We did talk but we did not go into details. We knew that we were going to get married, have kids, have a house, and buy a car. These are the things we discussed. We did not go deeper.

According to Kathide (2000:14), marriage has to do with the future of both individuals as well as partners. Furthermore, Kathide (2000:14) states that nobody would like to marry someone whose future is bleak and uninviting. It is a difficult thing to marry someone who has no zest for life or career plans. Such a situation can be very

frustrating and limiting (Kathide 2000:14). Mashau (2016a:81) agrees and say every couple that intends to get married should have clear vision of what they marriage should look like. Unlike in the past when people married because they had to, the challenges and context times requires a different approach (Kathide 2000:14).

Whereas in time past a woman was expected to be a bearer of children and burdens, keeping the home fires burning, the modern African woman is a different kettle of fish. She wants to be in the marketplace and be actively involved out there where things are happening – in politics and economics, in life shaping structures and decision-making processes. Woman want to shape their own destiny rather than to just allow men decide for them (Kathide 2000:14).

Annexure I contains exact quotes from each participant about their perceptions and knowledge of premarital therapy.

4.7.4 Theme 4: Financial matters

Out of 18 participants, 18 (100%) indicated that the Church did not enlighten them more about financial management in marriage.

One participant said:

More than anything many marriages break up because of the finances. People are not financially intelligent in marriages hence many breakdowns. I also believe that a healthy marriage is a wonderful thing because in a healthy marriage you grow up.

Money is an intriguing and sensitive issue (Kathide 2000:112). Another important issue in many African marriages is poor money management and a lack of transparency (Matequele 2019:49). Mwititi and Dueck (2006:193) propose that one of the main reasons African spouses experience marital discord is due to financial stress. Mashau (2016a:108) clearly emphasizes that money is the underlying source of evil and has the capacity to devastate any marriage. Money can be a separating factor in marriage until a couple has a shared perspective on how they will create, save, and spend their money (Mashau 2016a:108). According to Awodele (2005:3), money issues are

sometimes caused by parents telling the husband or wife not to reveal his or her earnings to the spouse.

Taylor (1994:185) indicates that the stability of marriage is greatly impacted by the economic independence of young people. When spouses find work, they become less reliant on their family or clan, resulting in a 'nuclear' family structure. This change deprives them of the extended family's customary financial and moral support which traditionally supplied as a form of stability (Taylor 1994:185). Tau (2001:210-214) describes these economic variables as "hostile influences in the married couple's surroundings". These environmental factors include, but are not limited to, extreme wealth or poverty, subpar housing, and unfavourable working circumstances (Tau 2001:210-214). Bawa (2017:68) asserts that covetousness is a negative mindset that can undermine marriages, especially in cases when spouses are unhappy with their financial circumstances and succumb to greed, by envying and desiring other people's lives and possessions. The Bible cautions against covetousness, but when these warnings are routinely disregarded, it can lead to marital difficulties. In many African civilisations, the need for a large bride price prior to a wedding usually causes problems both before and after marriage, as it can deplete the financial resources that couples require for survival once married (Bawa 2017:68). African men who want to get married in a church experience a lot of financial hardship since they have to pay for both the traditional bride price, called *lobola*, and the expenses of a customary "white" wedding. They now have the responsibility of juggling two sets of cultural expectations. However, the cost of a white wedding, including the ring, a suit, and wedding gown, is frequently non-negotiable, whereas the *lobola* is negotiable (Bawa 2017:69).

4.7.5 Theme 5: Intimacy issues and family planning

Out of 18 participants, 15 (83%) indicated that the Church did not do an excellent job in ensuring that they were fully prepared for their marriage journey. While 2 (two) participants (17%) were neutral on the matter and 1 participants indicated that sex and family planning was discussed narrowly and not in detail.

During the interview, Participant 2 stated:

I think the church should prepare the girl child or woman in all areas of marriage. We are makers and breakers of the marriages. Not being sexist or anything, but we are powerful and then if this gender is not groomed, there is a chance of breeding angry men. We breed drunkards and always when there is a problem in the marriage, particularly with sexual issues, mistakes will always be visible to the community because this is how men vent by overindulging in alcohol, not coming home and not supporting the family financially. So, the church should play a role in teaching about intimacy issues.

There are claims that having sex before marriage has a detrimental effect on the stability and quality of the union (Bawa, 2017:65). However, society is exposed to a great deal of sexual exploration and indulgence in the modern world. Bawa (2017:65) asserts that this could have an adverse effect on the stability and quality of subsequent marriages. According to Taylor (1994:185), there is a greater chance of sexual activity because of the present shift in perceptions towards sex as regularly depicted in the media. This includes allusions to sex on the radio, TV, newspaper articles, commercials, and the increased availability of contraception. Taylor (1994:185) continues to argue that many young people see premarital sexual adventures and promiscuity as necessary aspects of growing up based on this open exhibition of sex in the media. This promotes youngsters to have false, "romantic" ideas about sexual interactions (Taylor, 1994:185). Collins (2007:529) argues that this laxer sexual code might encourage unethical behaviour. He points out that "dating for many has become a time for exploring each other's bodies and genitals, rather than each other's interests, beliefs, values, goals, minds, feelings, and expectations." He continues that "Love is reduced to sex" due to the increased acceptance of premarital sex among Christians (Collins 2007:529). Collins (2007:529) bemoans the fact that by disobeying God's instructions for a fulfilled existence, many people become slaves of their basic inclinations and bodily impulses.

Annexure I contains exact quotes from each participant about their views and understandings of premarital therapy.

4.7.6 Theme 6: Communication management

Out of 18 participants, all participants (100%) indicated that the Church did not provide them with communication skills to speak about the importance of communication in marriage journey. One of the participants mentioned that:

To make it much simpler, palatable, and consumable, maybe we can talk about that enrichment seminar you attended. By the way, the professor that is supervising me was one of the presenters. The other one spoke about marriage counselling and the other one spoke about the school of marriage.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of communication in a marriage and how important it is to resolve conflicts (Gladding, 2011:36; Hoff, 2002:118; Leoto, 2004:31, 36; Masakona, 2000:54; Mashau, 2005:64; Mwiti and Dueck, 2006:196; Worthington, 2005:64–65). Strong communication promotes commitment and pleasure in the marriage, while poor communication can make one spouse feel undervalued and unwanted (Worthington, 2005:66–67). Both verbal and nonverbal cues are signs of effective communication (Matequele, 2019:52). Matequele (2019:52) suggests that couples having trouble with conflict should begin with activities emphasising collaboration and self-control. It is important to highlight the benefits of conflict resolution, the qualities needed for a fair resolution, and the ways in which couples may come out on top in these kinds of circumstances (Matequele, 2019:52).

Matequele (2019:52) notes that humility and owning up to mistakes are also essential components of effective communication development. Nascimento (2001:113) contends that couples should learn to accept each other's shortcomings and collaborate to discover solutions rather than placing blame on one another. Because marriage unites two people with different origins, experiences, emotions, and viewpoints, couples should expect disputes (Matequele, 2019:52). With the help of good communication, they must learn how to deal with these differences in a healthy way (Hoff, 2002:118). Talking about marital love and family matters should become a habit for couples (Matequele, 2019:52). Duarte (2008:89) asserts that wives' recommendations, acts, and counsel to their husbands about matters pertaining to the family and society are seldom heeded and frequently disregarded. Leoto (2004:31, 36, 57) and Reifler (2007:154), on the other hand, describe a home as a place where

communication occurs and where there is a mutual knowledge and awareness of each partner's thoughts, feelings, values, likes, respects, and expectations.

4.7.7 Theme 7: The importance of the premarital counselling if it could be considered and recommendation

Out of 18 participants, all participants (100%) would like premarital counselling to be provided to all couples intending to marry.

One participant mentioned:

Premarital counselling should deal with topics like differences in family background and how to overcome the gap, changes in the family system, the status of the woman, education, employment, misconceptions about sex, family planning, pregnancy and children, role sharing in marriage, interpersonal relationships, and the art of communication.

Premarital therapy, according to Williams (2007:11), offers direction on how to resolve conflicts and deal with challenging topics such as societal values, customs and practices, mutual trust, people's lifestyles and habits, relationships with in-laws and extended families, and money management. Williams (2007:11–12) highlights the need to consider the traits of the prospective husband and wife, as well as marriage expectations, friends, spirituality, and leisure activities.

Annexure I contains verbatim quotations from each participant about their thoughts and perspectives on premarital therapy.

4.7.8 Theme 8: The role the Church played in premarital counselling and its Effectiveness

Out of 18 participants, 15 (83%) indicated that the Church did not do an excellent job ensuring they were fully prepared for their marriage journey. While 3 (17%) were neutral on the matter.

The majority of those surveyed firmly expressed their belief that the church did not fulfil its vital responsibility of ensuring that they were ready to embark on their marital journey. The pastoral care and counselling support from the church was lacking. It

became evident that the majority entered the race being ill-prepared. Some fortunately are still married; however, the ones who are separated and divorced conceded that the experience of divorce and loss of relationship left them deeply wounded psychologically and spiritually. The participants who are still married and who were interviewed strongly indicated that the church need to develop some strategies that would ensure strong pastoral care and counselling support for the couples who are getting married. The participants indicated to the researcher that they did not get enough support or there was a lack thereof from the church. The married couple ended up having to navigate their own new way through the marriage and that made it difficult to cope with marriage challenges. One participant indicated:

I don't think the church during those times was preparing people for marriage. I think if they did, we would not have so many divorces and we would not have lot of conflicts. So, the church during those days it was just like you are coming together and you want to get married and then the question will be do you love each other, do you love him, that's it but they don't go deep. Do you know what is happening in the marriage, do you know the challenges of the marriages? Have you asked yourself why did you want to get married, why. That question is important. Why do I want to get married? Is it you want to please your family, your friends or you want the status of I am married. Not knowing the inside of the marriage. The church during those days, they did not prepare us for the insight.

Another participant pointed out to the researcher that:

We were married by the Minister of the Church. So, my witnesses were two elders from the Church Council. All I remember they said they will sign as witness provided you promise me you won't divorce.

The other participant said:

Pre-counselling must be there, some of the contents of things to be discussed must include people with experience to assist in guiding a couple that intend to get married. The issue of finances plays a major role in the marriage. People must be taught to live within their means because people get into marriage trying to impress people. That is one great down force of marriages. Once you get into a marriage in that way, you are going to struggle to get out of debt,

maybe it is going to take you five to 10 years to get out of debt. If you were counselled before, and they teach you that you must live within your means. So if there is no awareness or there is no one that tell you and warn that you must not go that route, then you are going to fall into a trap. And there will be tension at home.

Khathide (2000:171) asserts that the church need to take a proactive stance in ensuring that marriages are firmly based on mutual fulfilment and stability. If the church does not do its function of instruction before marriage, it becomes hypocritical to want to be involved when the marriage is on the rocks (Kathide 2000:171). Premarital counselling can help a couple get off to a stronger start (Mwiti and Dueck, 2006:163). People must learn to comprehend each other in order to complement one another for the edifying of their love (Mashau 2005:51). It is critical not only to recognize possible difficulties early on, but also to equip individuals with the abilities they will need to face future obstacles (Matiquele 2019:55). Writing about the value of premarital therapy for the stability of Christian marriage, Musa (2010:33) stipulates that “the better one prepares for every endeavour in life, the greater the odds of success” (Musa 2010:33).

Musa (2010:33) further clarifies that “you will find that more frequently than not, the area in which we are least seriously prepared is this lifetime partnership for Christian marriage” (Musa 2010:33).

Khathide (200:171) concludes that the church needs to work the journey with fellow believers, furthermore, it must assist in preparing couples as humanly as possible for whatever God will call them to do, whether in marriage or singleness. There must also be a continuous servicing and enrichment of marriages, by the church (Khathide 2000:171). For the church to “witness” and “bless” a marriage, “involves ongoing accountability for its success” (Kathide 2000:172).

Church support through pastoral care and counselling is very important in the daily lives of members of the congregation, particularly for marriages. A lack of support creates more challenges for couples in some instances, causing a lot of emotional pain and also putting a lot of psychological strain on families. Kinoti and Waruta (2000:85) state that:

The Church should act as an insider, working within the structures rather than simply being a 'voice wailing in the desert'. Individuals become unstable as a result of social system instability, particularly when they are rendered passive or helpless in the face of what they perceive to be mysterious forces responsible for their economic hardships, mental and physical instability, poverty, and other aspects of personal and social distress.

4.7.9 Theme 9. Understanding of premarital counselling by participants or the lack thereof

Of the 18 participants, 17 (94%) said they did not fully comprehend premarital therapy and did not possess the necessary skills for marriage.

The majority of the participants testified that premarital counselling was not just a want but a necessity. However, the study revealed that there were different understandings of premarital counselling, as well as different expectations. This should be understood, since the subject of premarital counselling has not been fully dealt with in most of the Northern Synod URCSA congregations. Secondly, the participants and partners met coming from different denominational backgrounds. This compounded the challenge of understanding premarital counselling and indicated the need thereof. Most of the participants indicated that premarital counselling was not provided when they were preparing for their wedding celebration. Kiriswa (2003:86) supports the theme by indicating that premarital counselling is aimed at helping those preparing for marriage to learn more about themselves and their unique relationship. In addition, Kiriswa (2003) opines that the Church is involved in teaching about marriage and individual couples are expected to give feedback on where each partner stands in regard to areas important to their marriage. Similarly, Khathide (2000:11) also supports the theme and states that there is no substitute for thorough preparation for the marriage covenant. Proper grounding in the principle of the fulfilling Christian marriage is essential.

According to Dabone and Adzovie (2021:11), premarital counselling helps couples have a strong, healthy relationship and increases their chances of having a secure and enjoyable marriage.

Most of the participants mentioned that premarital counselling and counselling support from the church was lacking, even though it was needed to give the couples guidance and what they were getting themselves into. They confessed that their experiences were trial and error, and in some cases it led to separation and/or even divorce. Participants indicated that the church did not do enough to prepare them for the marriage journey and thus making it difficult to cope with marriage challenges.

Participant 1 stated that:

According to me, it is a contract; before you enter into a contract, you must go through the fine lines. If you agree to the terms and conditions, you attach your signature because this nowadays, people just go in without checking fine prints. Once you realise that I did not read the fine lines, there is no reverse. Once you do not agree to that, you need to negotiate to your partner. If you do not agree with your partner, there's where the problem comes because one of you will choose another direction and same to the other partner. So that's where the conflict starts.

This was confirmed by participant 3:

I got exposed to premarital counselling when the Charismatic Churches started to grow as they had premarital counselling offerings. In the mainline churches like Dutch, when I grew up, they only announced Bans for 3 weeks and if they were no objections in the 3 weeks, the wedding would proceed. I have always known to be a meaning that if my partner Mr Z want to marry somewhere again out of town or in Thabazimbi, for example, somebody will come and disagree. We were really never called and spoken about what marriage is. Premarital in Sesotho tradition, parents will do it in a way "yaa go laya" (counselling). They would briefly talk about what is expected from wife and husband, but briefly not in details. So, the black culture and mainline churches didn't give premarital counselling in full until Charismatics churches started. We only started hearing about courtship and counselling when they started spreading in the townships. I really was not exposed to premarital counselling. So, that was the perception I had about premarital counselling.

Williams (2012:2) asserts that a person's religion, social group, and cultural background are only a few of the many influences that shape their views and ideas regarding marriage. Their notion of marriage begins to develop while they are still young (Matiquele 2019:42).

Premarital counselling is crucial, according to Collins (2007:525–526), for the following reasons: it prevents couples from rushing into marriage without first discussing their future together; it informs couples about where they can go for help if the need arises in the future; and it allows couples to develop coping mechanisms for dealing with marital challenges as well as communication skills, which can reduce the risk of divorce in their intended marriage.

According to Collins (2007:532), intended couples are more likely to engage if they have a positive attitude about counselling and it was recommended by someone they respect. Collins (2007:532) asserts that premarital therapy is more likely to be accepted by clients if it addresses topics close to their hearts, such as conflict resolution and communication skills. Whereas some couples value the sincerity and charisma of the therapist leader. If couples knew they would have to provide personal information about their history, it may make them less confident in their current relationship and make them reluctant to engage in therapy (Collin 2007:532).

Premarital therapy has been shown to be beneficial for marriage success. Hence, Clinebell (1975:49) suggests that engaged couples should seek it out far in advance, ideally six months or more before the wedding, before the “rush and crush” phase. Preparation crammed into the last few days before the event is typically squandered, as it is overshadowed by weariness and worry.

As a researcher, after collecting data from the participants, it was discovered that participants were very much interested in the premarital counselling and wished the URCSA could have offered it. Some started comparing what the Charismatic Churches is offering, which is not being offered within the URCSA. They were aware of the benefits thereof; unfortunately, they never got it. Perhaps some marriages could have been restored even if there is no guarantee.

Annexure I contains additional verbatim quotes from participants about their understanding and thoughts on premarital therapy.

4.8 Challenges experienced during data collection

The researcher in general never encountered major problems, except that in some instances, participants would be excited and provide long answers to the questions asked. Some became emotional and voiced their marriage problems. The researcher had to show empathy but at the same time it was strategic to move on to the next questions. Most of the participants mentioned that premarital counselling is very important and must be considered.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research findings in five themes and five sub-themes: perceived understanding of premarital counselling, the role the Church played and its effectiveness, challenges experienced due to a lack of premarital counselling, conflict management, family and extended family, developing a vision and mission for the family, finances, intimacy issues and family planning, and communication.

The participants' perspectives on the church's role in pastoral care and counselling were examined, and literature was used to support or refute the data gathered from participants. This is an important chapter for the researcher since it reveals and exposes the field work findings and interpretations relating to the study's objectives and purpose. The research findings also indicated that premarital counselling services are not available within the URCSA congregation, despite the fact that couples are seeking them and would want to see them implemented. This could be triggered by the escalating divorce rate and many other marriage challenges that are being experienced within the church.

Finally, the researcher discussed the difficulties he faced during data collecting, processing, and interpretation. The presentation of the research findings aided the researcher's exploration and quest for a comprehensive narrative-hermeneutical

premarital counselling model for the URCSA congregation. The next chapter will concentrate on the normative job.

CHAPTER 5

PREPARING FOR A BELHAR-SHAPED MARRIAGE A NORMATIVE REFORMED APPROACH

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter concentrated on presenting the research findings, followed by a brief discussion. In Chapter 1.8.3, it was stated that the research approach used in this study is consistent with Osmer's concept of practical theology. This chapter concentrates on the third task of Osmer's paradigm, the normative task, which poses the question: "What should be going on?" (Osmer 2008:131). Osmer defines this duty as prophetic discernment for the present situation, which entails using theological conceptions to analyze episodes, situations, and contexts. According to Osmer (2008:131), there are three techniques for discovering God's will in the present situation: theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and good conduct. This chapter uses the first method, namely theological interpretation, by focusing on the Belhar Confession and on a number of biblical passages that are directly relevant to a process of marriage preparation for congregants. The aim of this chapter can be described as identifying foundational principles regarding marriage from selected passages of Scripture, read together with the Belhar confession.

5.1.1 The use of biblical passages

A Reformed perspective on the topic of marriage begins with the Bible, as it serves as the highest authority on matters of faith and life. It provides the foundation for both theological interpretation and moral contemplation. For that reason, several key biblical passages on marriage will be discussed in this chapter. These specific scripture texts, seen as a normative standard for marriage and the foundation for appropriate practice in marital preparation, are examined using commentaries and other interpretive literature. Janse van Rensburg *et al.* (2015) present a hermeneutical technique for interpreting these sections. Focussing on the definitions of certain terms and phrases related to marriage that are used in both the Old and New Testaments is one aspect of that strategy (Janse van Rensburg *et al.*, 2015:171).

The texts that have been chosen are Deuteronomy 24:5, Psalm 128:3, Ephesians 5:21–33, Genesis 2–19–24, and 1 Timothy 3–5. They were selected to address some of the issues brought up during the empirical research in Chapter 4 and serve as a springboard for reflection on God's original design for marriage, as well as being pertinent to marriage in general. These difficulties are addressed further in the consideration of the biblical passages.

5.1.2 The use of the Belhar Confession

In Chapter 3 the Reformed understanding and role of confessions as well as the origin and background of the Belhar Confession were explained. This chapter interprets Belhar with a view to a Christian understanding of marriage. As pointed out in Chapter 3, Belhar does not address marriage explicitly, since its main purpose was to critique racism and its justification by Reformed theologians. It is the contention of this study, however, that Belhar is highly relevant for a Christian view of marriage, for three reasons:

First, because this study is done within the URCSA, includes interviews with members of a URCSA congregation (Chapter 4), and is designed to develop a premarital counselling programme for URCSA members (Chapter 6), it is logical and acceptable for one of this church's own confessions to be used to throw light on Christian marriage life.

Second, one of the key functions of a confession in the life of a Reformed church is to shape the faith and life of its members, in response to a specific challenge or crisis to its well-being. Smit (2009:315) says that a Reformed confession "must command something, call them [church members] to a new lifestyle, to ethics according to God's Word". In other words, one of the key functions of a confession is to urge church members to live a genuinely Christian life, in the midst of a church and a society that either rejects, distorts, or ignores it. A confession like Belhar is a call to action. It is therefore justified to examine the kind of action to which it calls URCSA members, also in relation to their marriage life.

Third, Belhar is relevant for marriage since it is a call to authentic Christian community life. In opposition to the racist theology and practice of apartheid, which led to a

distorted Christian community and church life, Belhar gives a clear picture of what a Christian community shaped by Scripture should look like. Its fivefold message – about God’s initiative in gathering and preserving the church (article 1), the gift and obligation of unity (article 2), God’s provision for reconciliation between enemies (article 3), God’s stand in opposition to injustice (article 4) and the call to unconditional obedience to Christ (article 5) – applies not only to the church at large, but also to the smallest unit of Christian community life, namely marriage and family. One could even argue that if Belhar is not effective in shaping Christian community life at the level of families and married couples, which are the smallest units of the congregation, it is not likely to have much impact in broader community relations.

The well-known saying “Charity begins at home” applies here, but in this context it is better to say: “Unity, reconciliation, justice and obedience begin at home” – in sanctified marriage and family partnerships. Such a way of life in accordance with Belhar needs to be inculcated and nurtured at home, in marriage and family life, and spread from there to every other domain of life and society. As indicated in the title of the chapter, this implies a “Belhar-shaped” marriage, characterised by the different aspects of Christian community life addressed by its five articles.

Belhar thus provides a vision of what Christian community is and how it deals with differences as far as disunity, alienation and injustice are concerned. Belhar is a clear blueprint for how to live the gospel, providing clear guidelines and principles that can assist couples on how to accept one another, deal with differences, resolve conflicts and practise justice.

For these three reasons, it is justifiable to use the Belhar Confession in the context of the URCSA to build a strong vision and foundation for Christian marriage.

5.2 A Belhar-shaped marriage partnership

In the following sections, the five articles of Belhar are used to structure the presentation and the five biblical passages mentioned in 5.1.1 are included at relevant points in the discussion.

5.2.1 God's initiative and faithfulness

Article 1 of the Belhar Confession reads:

We believe in a triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has gathered, protected, and cared for the church since the beginning of time and will continue to do so until the end.

Belhar's first article underlines that the church is a community of faith brought together by the triune God, as opposed to something created by humans. emphasize. It stresses that the God who graciously gathers the church together also faithfully protects and cares for the church. Is it valid to apply this general statement about the church to a marriage relationship? Can one honestly confess, with Belhar article 1, that every marriage is "made in heaven", in the sense that it is God who "gathers" the two partners together and "gives" them to each other?

It would be irresponsible and unrealistic to make such a claim. Many marriages end up in divorce, due to the fact that they were built on another foundation in the first place. And Belhar does not make such a claim for the church community in general or for marriage partnerships in particular. Sadly, there are many members who are "gathered" into the church through baptism who do not remain faithful to God, in the same way that many Christian marriages do not last. It is important to note that Belhar says "We believe that ..." In other words, this high view of the church as God's gathered-protected-cared-for community is an article of faith, not an empirical statement based on evidence. This is what Reformed (and most other) Christians believe the church to be.

Applied to a marriage partnership, Belhar therefore urges us to say: "We believe that it is God who has brought this couple together, which is why we also believe that God will protect and care for their relationship". In order to give a solid foundation to this view of marriage, it is necessary to refer to our first biblical passage, namely Genesis 2:19-25. This passage highlights the loneliness of "the man" (*ha-adam* in Hebrew) and the inadequacy of the animals to be a "suitable helper" for him (Gen. 2:19-20). After "making" a woman from the man's rib (Gen. 2:21), God brings her to him and gives her to him as partner. The man responds to her with relief and joy, by issuing the well-known "bridegroom's jubilation":

This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called “woman”,
for she was taken out of man (Gen. 2:23).

Whatever else this narrative conveys, it communicates that it is God who gives the man a partner and brings her to him. The biblical passage, and most churches along with it, believe that marriage is based on God’s caring initiative, since “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:19). This “ideal” or prototype picture of marriage from the patriarchal (male-centred) Hebrew culture of 3,000 years ago, which is the basis of this story, needs to be complemented with the perspective from the New Testament and Belhar, so that we need to say: “We believe that it is not good for a woman or a man to be alone”.

The passage's final verse emphasizes the close union between man and woman established by marriage: “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be married to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

This biblical passage and Belhar article 1 both emphasize God’s initiative in gathering and bringing together marriage partners, but verse 24 also stresses human responsibility: A man takes the initiative to leave the security of his parental home and to set up a home together with his wife. This act of leaving is an act of love that unites two partners into becoming “one flesh” – a new entity that can only be described as “we” and “us”, which is formed out of two separate “I’s”, but without destroying their unique personhood. It is also an act of faith, in which two partners put their trust in each other as they take the risk of venturing out together. It is also an act of hope, that the God who gave them to each other will protect and nurture their relationship into the future.

This third argument is supported by Kritzinger's interpretation of Belhar article 1's message, which includes the catchphrase “Hope in God's faithfulness” (Kritzinger 2017:336). He explains that although God's faithful assembly and feeding of the church demands gratitude and obedience, it most importantly demands confidence in God's unwavering faithfulness “until the end” (Kritzinger 2017:337).

To conclude this section, Belhar article 1 and Gen. 2:19-24, when read together, affirm that it is God who established and wills marriage, as an antidote to loneliness, and who brings partners together, giving them to each other. This lays an obligation on marriage partners to live in faith, hope and love, as they venture out together. They need to put God first in their marriage, as they put their hope in God's faithfulness. This confirms the saying "The family that prays together stays together". God is the one who ordained and presided over the first "prototypical" marriage in the Garden of Eden and who is still at work, gathering, protecting, and caring for marriage partners. In Chapter 6 it will be shown how this approach to marriage that is found in Belhar article 1 and Gen. 2:19-24 can be used in premarital counselling, to help create a firm foundation for a lifelong partnership.

5.2.2 Accepting one another in partnership

Article 2 of the Belhar Confession indicate accepting one another just as Christ accepted us.

- *We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is manifested in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and one another (Eph 2:11-22).*
- *that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit, it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought, one which the people of God must constantly be built up to attain; (Eph 4:1-16)*
- *that this unity must become evident so that the world may believe; that separation, antagonism, and hatred between persons and groups is sin which Christ has already defeated, and therefore that everything that undermines this unity has no place in the church and must be rejected; (John 17:20,23)*
- *that the only prerequisite for membership in our church is a sincere trust in Jesus Christ.*

In African indigenous therapy, according to Mogolodi and Moeti (2017:66), there is a therapy known as *Botho*. This therapy is based on the indigenous principle *motho ke motho ka batho* (I am because we are). This concept encourages togetherness, connectivity, collectiveness, compassion, love, and harmony, as well as the development of long-term family relationships (Mogolodi and Moeti 2017:66). As

Kritzinger (2017:337) eloquently describes, this is the essence of “accepting one another.” On the other hand, the only critique that may be levelled against this is that, it does not underline God's initiative as noted in Article 2, namely that unity is both a gift and a necessity (Kritzinger 2017:337).

Kuys (2017:307) highlights the following crucial sentences in the article on unity from the confession, which should shed light on what the Belhar Confession precisely and practically expects of us:

- ... a gift and obligation
- ... through the working of the God's Spirit it is a binding force
- ... a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought
- ... one which the people of God must continually be build up to attain
- ... that this unity must become visible
- ... that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways:
in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another
- ... together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens
- ... together fight against everything that may threaten or hinder unity

Kathide (2000:167) postulate that marriage, as a partnership, is rooted in the idea of equality. In a partnership there is no hierarchical structure of superiority and inferiority (Kathide 2000:167). In marriage the two are said to become one flesh (Matthew 19:5). According to Mashau (2016a:68), becoming one flesh entails a total surrender of one person to another in the act of marriage. The two are expected to relinquish their love for the self for the sake of the other (Mashau 2016a:68). This is a total commitment and a total sharing of total person with another person until death (Mack 1977:4). In a partnership, the element of complementarity reigns supreme (Kathide 2000:167). The researcher agrees as in marriage where the two are united in holy matrimony share everything that they are and what they have including their bodies, their possessions, their insights, their ideas, their abilities, their problems, their successes, sufferings, their failures, and so on (Mashau 2016a:68).

In the context of marriage and in the spirit of Belhar Confession couples should practically welcome and accept one another. Through the death of Christ families/

couples have been reconciled with God and one another. Couple need to demonstrate unity which was given, and it must be visible so that the world may believe. Anything that threatens this unity like separation or divorced has no place in Christian marriage. In marriage couples must love another, giving themselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another.

5.2.3 Nurturing Reconciliation

Article 3: *We believe:*

- *that God has entrusted the church with the gospel of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).*
- *that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, and that the church bears witness to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells by word and deed (Mt 6:13-16, Mt 5:9, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21).*
- *that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has vanquished the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation, anger, bitterness, and enmity (Eph 4:17, 6:23, Rom 6, Col 1:9-14).*
- *that God's life-giving Word and Spirit will empower the church to live in a new obedience that can open up new possibilities of life for society and the world; (Col 2:13-19, Col 3:1-6).*
- *that the credibility of this message is significantly harmed and its beneficial work hampered when it is preached in a land that pretends to be Christian, but in which the enforced division of individuals on a racial basis encourages and perpetuates estrangement, animosity, and enmity;*
- *that any teaching that attempts to legitimize such forced separation through an appeal to the gospel but is unwilling to embark on the path of obedience and reconciliation, but instead, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness, and unbelief, denies the gospel's reconciling power in advance, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.*

God has already defeated the forces of irreconciliation, anger, bitterness, and animosity. There is an old Setswana phrase that says: *ga gona ntlo e sa neng* (marriage issues are unavoidable/every household faces challenges), thus couples are encouraged and psychologically prepared for the challenges ahead.

God has entrusted the marriage with the message of reconciliation. Through their deeds and actions couples should demonstrate that they are the salt of the earth and light of the world.

The word of God and Spirit will enable the families/ couples to conquer the powers of sin and to live in a new obedience. Thus, avoid fighting, unpleasant environment that eventually led to unnecessary divorces.

Finally in marriage couples need to nurture each other and this involves seeking each other's emotional needs for affection. Every individual has a need of longing to be loved and appreciated. Therefore giving each other emotional support reassures them.

The researcher views a relationship is like a plant. To grow a plant it takes a patience, one need to nurture it with care and attention, and one patient efforts will be rewarded. When one grows a plant you sow a seed, you need to nurture it, you need to use the right fertilizers, you need to water it, before it starts bearing the fruits of flowers.

A relationship is like a plant it takes consistent work from both sides to build a meaningful relationship. Nurture it with care and curtesy and attention. Then your efforts will be rewarded. Khathide (2000:68-77) uses an example of the pilot of an aeroplane to prove the importance of nurturing a relationship and premarital counselling. Before a person can fly an aeroplane, it takes a long time, hard work, rigorous training, and many other things. Flying an aeroplane involves taking passengers from one place to another and it involves the lives of other people, not only of the pilot. Taking such responsibility should require long hours of learning, expertise, excellence, and vigilance. The same principles apply to marriage (Please see 2.16).

5.2.4 Compassionate justice (Doing justice)

The Church, which belongs to God, should stand where God is.

Article 4: *We believe*

- *that God has revealed Godself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that in a world full of injustice and enmity, God*

is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged, and that God calls the church to follow in this; that God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that God frees the prisoners and restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the strangers, helps or; that God wishes to teach the people of God to do what is good and to seek the right;

- *that the church must thus stand by people in whatever kind of suffering and need, which entails, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice can pour down like floods and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;*
- *that the church, as God's body, should stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the oppressed; that in following Christ, the Church must bear witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and so control and damage others.*

In marriage couples must stand with each other, side by side. During difficult and turbulent times when relationships are challenged, spouses must battle against any type of unfairness so that justice prevails in marriage. As marriage was created by God, the pillar of strength should be the gospel of God.

5.2.5 Serve one Lord

The Church is called to confess and practice all of these things in obedience to Jesus Christ, her one Head.

Article 5: *We believe*

- *that the Church is called to profess and practice all of these things in obedience to Jesus Christ, its sole Head, even if authorities and human laws forbid them, with the consequence of condemnation and suffering.*
- *Jesus is Lord.*
- *To the one and only God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever.*

In order to get peace and joy in marriage couples must be obedient to Jesus Christ and make Him the Head of their marriage.

Paul writes to the Corinthian church, “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Marriage is no exception. This should be the ultimate in marriage relationship – to glory of God. Marriage should reflect that relationship of male unconditional love and female unreserved yielding (Khathide 2000:170).

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the focus was on Belhar confession of 1986 and how it can be applied in marriages. Belhar relevance in marriage was reiterated. Marriage was ordained by God. God gathers, nurtures and protect marriages. Marriage encourages a man to abandon his parents in favour of his wife. The husband and wife are cemented together to present a single, cohesive front through the act of parting and cleaving. They hope in the Lord and should pray for the unity of their marriage accepting one another as partners. Partners in marriage are in a long journey of life in which they must share the joys and the challenges together. This can only be achieved by constant, daily drawing to the true source of love and marriage, God himself, through prayer, God’s word and associating with God’s people who help us with a godly supportive network (Khathide 2000:170). Marriage should glorify Jesus Christ.

The next chapter presents the proposed narrative-hermeneutical premarital counselling programme of the study.

CHAPTER 6

PRAGMATIC TASK

PROPOSED NARRATIVE-HERMENEUTICAL PREMARITAL COUNSELLING PROCESS

6.1 Introduction

Having made a context analysis of the general features of marriages of black urban Christians (Chapter 2), the marriage practices of URCSA congregations (Chapter 3), the views of a number of research participants on marriage challenges (Chapter 4), and the vision of the Belhar Confession on Christian partnership and co-existence (Chapter 5), the thesis now reaches its culmination by proposing a concrete premarital counselling programme, based on the narrative-hermeneutical approach spelled out in Chapter 1. This chapter focuses on the fourth part of Osmer's approach to Practical Theology, which is to address the pragmatic question: "What needs to be done/How could we respond?" (Osmer 2008:4). According to some, understanding the pragmatic job is the fourth hermeneutical task in the practical theological process (Osmer, 2008:176). In order to accomplish the goal of the study, which is to create a marriage preparation process that will help engaged couples build a solid foundation for their marriage journey—and in this case, in the congregation where the research was conducted—a synthesis of the research findings of the previous tasks has been made through a hermeneutical interaction between the various study components, as previously mentioned. This chapter addresses the issues raised during the context description (Chapter 2) and the empirical study (Chapter 4), by combining theological and ministry insights generated by the literature review (Chapter 2) and the normative reflection (Chapter 5) into an integrated programme to achieve the study's objectives and answer the research questions. As a result, this chapter provides an outline for a relevant counselling plan for prospective couples.

This counselling programme is not presented as the imposition of a rigid set of rules for counsellors or prospective marriage partners. In line with a narrative approach, it presents the proposed programme as a respectful shared journey between the marriage partners and a marriage counsellor, in which the latter joins them for a short

term to help them tell their stories to each other and to clarify the values, goals and expectations of the shared story that they are embarking on together, as a long-term journey of marriage partners. As noted in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.1), since there is currently no specific module that provides future Ministers of the Word with techniques for counselling for marriage preparation, the proposed counselling program could also be included in the Northern Theological Seminary's (NTS) ministerial formation process. As a result, the proposed counselling curriculum might be employed in conjunction with that training.

6.2 An overview of the proposed premarital counselling journey

The eleven(11) workshops in the proposed curriculum begin with a workshop on introspection and reflection and go through ten(10) identified challenges that were discussed in earlier chapters. Table 4 below summarises the proposed premarital counselling journey to give an overview of the whole process at the outset.

Table 4: Proposed premarital counselling journey

Session	Issue to be addressed	Objectives and Goals
Session 1	Introspection/Reflection on the self-knowledge and motivation of both partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To understand “Who am I and why do I want to get married?”; ● To help a couple understand their personal strengths and weaknesses; ● To negotiate the ground rules of the counselling journey.
Session 2	Definition and appreciation of Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To help the partners affirm their own family background and get to know their partner’s family background ● Assignment: The couple “draw” their respective family trees and explain them to each other
Session 3	Defining marriage as partnership: A shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To help a couple understand partnership as a shared, value-based journey

	journey with common goals and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assignment: The couple jointly formulate their Vision, Mission, and Long/Short term goals
Session 4	Spiritual and cultural issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To understand and respect each other's cultural and faith context. ● To appreciate one another's personal belief system and rituals. ● To verify the approval/blessing and buy-in of their families and (lobola arrangements) ● Assignment: The couple draft a joint faith commitment as the foundation of their marriage journey
Session 5	Sexuality, intimacy, and family planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To understand intimacy as a gift from God ● To understand the importance of romance ● To discuss potential sexual problems ● Family planning (how many children do the couple want)
Session 6	Negotiating the partnership roles of husband and wife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Importance of understanding Submission and Love ● Understand what it means to be a Helper and Provider ● Agreeing on marital fidelity ● Assignment: The couple drafts the vows they want to say to one another on their wedding day.
Session 7	Extended Family, Friends, and colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To negotiate how they will relate after their marriage to their a) parents, siblings and in-laws; b) friends and colleagues ●
Session 8	Finance and money matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To encourage transparency and honesty on financial issues ● Teach about joint budgeting and long term financial planning

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If both partners are earning an income, agree on how their income will be spent ● Assignment: The couple draw up the priorities for their joint budget as a married couple
Session 9	Conflict Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How best to handle conflicts in a marriage partnership
Session 10	Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To understand the importance of communication ● Practising listening skills
Session 11	Health Matters, including Childlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How best to deal with childlessness in a marriage ● How to deal with health issues and agreeing on eating and drinking habits in Marriage

6.3 The format of workshop sessions

Premarital therapy is intended to help a couple learn how to strengthen their connection as husband and wife and lessen conflict throughout their marriage. African Christian couples that are married in the Reformed tradition should be able to demonstrate that they are Godfearing people who conduct their lives according to biblical guidance. The Bible says that God created marriage and that it was a part of his original design for humanity in Genesis 2:21–24. Subsequently, it is suggested that every decision the couple makes during their marriage should be informed by Scripture.

To ensure a good integration between the macro structure of the (six chapters of the) thesis and the proposed premarital counselling programme, Osmer’s four-dimensional approach was also used to design the micro structure of each workshop session. The logic behind this is that marriage preparation for a Christian couple is an exercise in “practical theology” and that they should be helped to see their shared faith journey in this way. In other words, a couple needs to be helped to develop descriptive, analytical, normative, and pragmatic skills in relation to their partnership and to integrate those skills as they prepare for their life together. It is the contention of this study that a

couple who learnt the skills of doing “a practical theology of marriage” in this way before their wedding, are likely to continue using those skills on an ongoing basis for the rest of their life together. To model this manner of doing practical theology to the couple and to inculcate it in their pattern of interacting with each other, each session will be shaped by the four “tasks” of Osmer.

6.3.1 The role of the facilitator

The facilitator is responsible for taking charge in the session and guiding the flow of the interaction in a firm but gentle way. They should model caring authority and empathy, by creating a safe space in which the couple feel comfortable and are able to communicate freely, without a fear of being judged. They need to introduce each session and set the scene, keeping to the agreed timeframes and any other “house rules” that have been agreed on. The role of the facilitator is to enable the participants to purposefully “write their own narratives” (cf. 2.1.4 and 2.1.5) that give meaning and direction to their lives. A facilitator should not take over the session as an instructor or preacher. The partners should be guided to communicate with each other in the presence of the facilitator, rather than to interact primarily with the facilitator. A facilitator should shape the sessions to be reassuring and respectful, by helping the partners to discover each other and to enjoy each other’s presence, even when discussing difficult or stressful issues.

A facilitator is expected to create an enabling environment in which the participants are able to talk and communicate openly to each other about all their wishes in their marriage life, including financial, professional and sexual matters. That would provide an opportunity for couples to break the ice and talk to each other openly and freely about their views on what a good marriage partnership is like. The following diagram expresses the fact that the main interaction in each session is between the two partners, not between the facilitator and the partners.

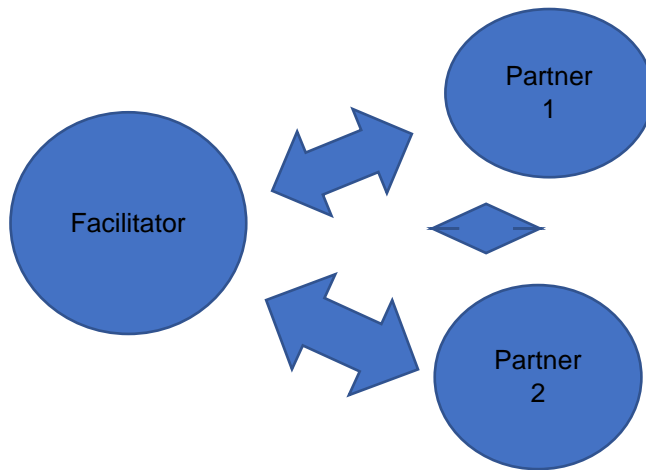


Figure 9: Main interaction is with Partners

The role of a facilitator is to lead with guiding questions that makes the participants to be very practical to think about possible mistakes and challenges they might face in the future and how they would think and act upon them. The sessions should provide guidelines for solving conflicts, for preventing marriage problems and being more proactive.

A facilitator should also act as a referee, to “blow the whistle” when the partners start interacting in a negative or hurtful way. The following features should of each session. A facilitator should ensure that the features mentioned below serve as guidelines to shape the structure of each session and that they are integrated on the basis of biblical principles.

6.3.2 The structure of each session

The eleven (11) workshop sessions outlined above are intended to help a couple “do practical theology” in terms of Osmer’s design, by developing descriptive, analytical, normative, and pragmatic skills for their partnership. However, this is a process of ministry, not research. For that reason, the first task of a session will not be descriptive, but normative. This follows the logic of the Belhar Confession, which begins by affirming belief in the triune God who takes the initiative by gathering, nurturing, and protecting God’s people. The final task of a session will be commitment to the Lordship of Christ, following Article 5 of Belhar. In that sense, the Belhar Confession will “frame” each session of this premarital counselling journey. The descriptive and analytical tasks will play there role in the “body” of each counselling session, but also in the take-

home assignments given to the couple to work on together, in preparation for the next session.

To give a pastoral shape to this process of doing practical theology together, the different tasks are combined in a threefold format of Embrace, Discover, Commit. This format of three successive phases is derived from a study manual on the Belhar Confession (Kritzinger 2014), which is explained in Kritzinger (2017). These three phases need to be explained, before giving attention to each individual session.

6.3.2.1 Embrace Prayer

Each session starts with prayer, to create a spiritual atmosphere for the session, acknowledging the primacy of God's grace. The term "embrace" refers in the first place to God's embrace of the couple, focusing Article 1 of Belhar specifically on their relationship (see 5.2.1). It could be helpful to use the same prayer at the start of each session to create continuity and to foster the awareness that a Christian marriage journey unfolds "before the face of God", in the light of God's presence, seeking God's blessing and guidance. If such a "standard" prayer is used, the couple and facilitator pray it aloud together. It could sound something like this:

Eternal, gathering God, we praise you for bringing us together
we seek your will for this marriage partnership
1 John 2: live in the light

Alternatively, the facilitator could also give each participant then opportunity to lead in a free prayer.

6.4 Session 1: Introspection/Reflection on the self-knowledge and motivation of both partners

6.4.1 Introduction to the topic

In session one (1), a couple would be assisted to do an introspection and reflection on their purpose and on the reasons why they want to get married. They also need to be informed on the significance of premarital counselling. The research revealed that there are still certain African customs where couples find it difficult to communicate

their feelings honestly and openly. This has a negative effect on marriage stability and the establishment of a solid basis for marriages. (cf. 2.4 and 2.10).

6.4.2 The objective of this session is:

- to make the couple understand “Who am I and why do I want to get married?”
- to help a couple understand their strengths and weaknesses.
- to negotiate the ground rules of the counselling journey and what the bible teaches about the first marriage God instituted.

6.4.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following Scripture passages will be studied and utilized as the basis for the discussion below: Gen 2:18 and 24, Ps 85:10, 1 Pet 3:7

6.4.3.1 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

During the first session the facilitator should assist couple to reflect on the scriptures mentioned in 6.2.1.1.3 and provide participants enough time to get deeper understanding spiritual aspects of the marriage

The facilitator to ensure that the couple engages with the scripture and discuss the following questions:

- What is your understanding of marriage (cf. 2.2; 2.21, 2.2.2, 2.3, 2.6)
- Why God deemed necessary to make a helper for Adam after God created Adam according to Gen 2:18?
- What does the passage in Gen 2:24 mean to you? What is the understanding thereof (cf. 2.6, 2.6.1, 2.6.2, 2.6.3)
- What is love and faithfulness according to Psalm 85:10?
- What are your views on love as described in 1 Cor 13?

6.4.4 Couple commitment and take home exercise

The couple might be assigned a take-home exercise to reflect on their understanding of marriage and discuss the actions they plan to take to foster love, respect, and trust.

This exercise would also involve considering the potential consequences of their actions, encouraging them to communicate honestly and openly with one another.

The following subjects and enquiries can be addressed:

- How does the bible present marriage and the story of love?
- What are your plans to demonstrate respect of your partner in your marriage journey?
- How are you going to build trust in your marriage?
- What is your opinion on fidelity and how can infidelity be avoided in marriage?

6.5 Session 2: Definition of Family

6.5.1 Introduction to the topic

In session two (2) the first thing that a couple would/ should be encouraged to do is to look at the background of each partner based on the family tree homework assigned to them.

6.5.2 The objective of these session is:

- To discover the line of origin or family background of prospective bride and bridegroom,
- To ensure each understand the family tree and where they originate from

6.5.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: Gen 5:1-32, 10:1-32, Ex 6:13-26, Ruth 4:18-22, Ezra 2:1-7) Mat 1:1-17,

From the biblical perspective a person background and line of origin has always been highly regarded. In Matthew 1:1-17 the gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus. The Old Testament has great number of genealogies (cf. Gen 5:1-32, 10:1-32, Ex 6:13-26, Ruth 4:18-22, Ezra 2:1-70). The question is why is the background and family history very important?

In Chapter 1 (cf. 1.6) Mbiti (1991:133) states that “marriage is the centre of existence.” It is a place where all members of a given society gather: the dead, the living, and those who have yet to be born” (Mbiti 1991:133).

Therefore, husband and wife marry to establish families, to make children and to ensure continuity of the clan, and divorce was something foreign (Khathide 2000:33). In African society and communities, marriage is the key institution around which the entire social structure revolves (Mulaudzi 2013:153). Gyekye (1996:76) opines that:

... marriage is more than just an affair between two people who fell in love and intend to spend the rest of their lives together. It is a topic of great interest to both the male and female lineages.

6.5.3.1 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant).

Therefore, it is important for couples to understand the following:

- Who are the parents of the partners they are intending to be married to;
- Who were their grandparents;
- Where did they live or are they living;
- What do they do;
- What kind of people are they;
- Family values, i.e. what are the most important characteristics;
- What is important to the family;
- Find out if they are committed Christians;
- Their religion and belief system;

The above would be able to give a Narrative about a prospective wife and husband to be.

6.6 Session 3: Defining partnership as a shared journey with common goals

6.6.1 Introduction to the topic

In session three (3) a couple would be encouraged to share their future expectation of their new journey to map their new marriage journey as partners. Every couple that intends to get married should have a clear vision of how their new life should look like. Not having a clear vision on how the future should look like, makes room for failure and disappointment.

6.6.2 The objective of these session is:

- To assist with develop Vision, Mission, Long/Short term goals for the partnership.

During the session the couple would be assisted to:

- understand each other's main need which they want this marriage/partnership to satisfy (cf. 4.8.2, 4.8.3),
- to specify that they want to achieve in the marriage they are entering,
- to agree on the roles each would play in marriage (cf. 2.2.3, 4.8.2),
- to agree how decision would be made in the marriage (cf. 2.2.2, 2.2.5, 2.6.2, 4.8.3).

6.6.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: Song of Songs 8:1-7, 4:9, Ps 85:10-11, 143:8, Pro 10:12, Mat 19:5, 1 Cor 16:14, 13,13.

6.6.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

- How do you interpret the passage of Songs of Song 8?
- What is love and faithfulness according to Psalm 85:10?
- What are the biblical principles that can be learned from Pro 10:12
- How is partnership in Mat 19:5 defined?
- How should things be done in marriage as per 1 Cor 16:14?
- What is the greatness thing in a relationship and why?

The couple in return could dive deeper into asking questions on the implication of the scriptures mentioned above and reflect on lessons learned from it:

- How can vision and mission be developed for marriage journey?
- How important is goal setting in the marriage?
- How important love in marriage relationship?

6.7 Session 4: Spiritual and Cultural issues

6.7.1 Introduction to the topic

Couples should be informed that in order to prevent detrimental impacts on their marriage, cultural problems should be discussed and examined in line with and/or based on biblical principles. They should first seek the Holy Spirit's advice on how to deal with cultural issues. They would be prompted to remember that, as Christians, they should always seek the wisdom of God's Spirit and His will on how to address cultural difficulties and practices.

The following topics could be addressed during the session:

- Cultural customs affect communication between husband and wife over sexual behaviour, ancestors, traditional rites, and sleeping arrangements during visits (see 2.2.4.1; 2.2.4.2; 4.8.3.1).
- The role that should be played by the extended families (cf. 1.6; 2.2.2)
- Wife abuse and patriarchal nature of marriage. The couple should treat each other as partners and the husband should not consider or see the wife as a child or mere property (cf. 1.6; 2.2.5; 2.8; 2.9).
- Gender equality dictates that women should enjoy the same rights and be accorded the same respect and dignity as men in marriage. (cf. 1.6.1.4; 1.6.1.5; 2.2.5; 2.9).

6.7.2 The objective of these session is:

- to make a couple to understand and respect each other's cultural and faith context;
- to make couples to appreciate one another's personal belief system and rituals;
- to encourage a couple to make a joint faith commitment as the foundation of their marriage journey;
- to verify family buy-in and approval/blessing (*lobola* arrangements).

6.7.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: Gen 2:18; Gal 3:28 and Gal 5:6.

6.7.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

- Why should a man have a wife as a partner according to Gen 2:18;
- What is Paul's conclusion on cultural differences in Gal 3:28;
- How can cultural differences be addressed to avoid marital problems according to Gal 5:6?
- What biblical principles can the couple learn from Gal 5:6?

6.7.5 Couple commitment and take home exercise

The pair can be assigned homework that requires them to have an honest and open conversation about cultural issues and their potential effects.

The following subjects and questions can be addressed:

- Which cultural issues bring about problems in the marriage?
- How best can cultural differences, if any, be dealt with?
- How best can marriage conflict be solved?
- How is the couple going to overcome influential cultural practices and issues dealing with love, fidelity, and infidelity?

6.8 Session 5: Sexuality, intimacy, and family planning

6.8.1 Introduction to the topic

In this session the couple will be assisted or empowered to establish patterns of relating that will help them to become closer and keep their marriage growing over a lifetime. During the session the couple would be reminded that sex is a gift from God for their pleasure and enjoyment within marriage (cf. Song of Songs). Furthermore, sex should be viewed as a way of communicating love that goes beyond words and as an act to express the "one flesh" bond designed to develop over a lifetime as mutual love.

The following topics could be addressed also in the session:

- The significance of proficient communication. Excellent communication between a husband and wife is crucial because it fosters closeness, love, and trust. God gave couples the gift of sex, which they may enjoy throughout their

marriage and use as a means of expressing their unconditional love (cf. song of songs 6:3). These could have a favourable effect on husbands and wives' interactions and sense of oneness. (cf.4.8.3.5 and cf. 5.3.5 Article 2 of Belhar Confession).

- Good sexual interactions have a variety of benefits for married couples. It relieves tension and personal irritation at home, improves love and affection for the partner, and promotes marital and domestic peace.

6.8.2 The objective of these session is:

- to assist couple how to develop intimacy which is a gift of God
- to understand the importance of romance
- to discuss potential sexual problems
- to assist with family planning (how many children do the couple want)

As this is one of the most important aspects of marriage, the couple will be empowered to understand the importance of communication openly about intimacy issues. In they would be able to talk about their feelings, and listening to the partner's feelings without interrupting, criticizing, or offering advice.

6.8.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: Gen 1:27-28, 2:23-25, Deut 24:5; Prov 5:18-19; 1 Cor 7:3-5 and Eph 5:3.

6.8.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

The facilitator could discuss with the couple the following questions on the scriptural passages:

- How each partners understand and interpret Gen 1:27-28 and what is the lessons that can be learned about marital rights sexual relationship for couples within marriage?
- What is God commanding couple in Gen 1:28 and Gen 2:23-25?
- What obligations do husband and wife have to one another in accordance with Deut 24:5?

- What insights do you and your partner attain from the passage in Proverbs 5:18–19 on marital rights and sexual relations? According to 1 Cor 7:2-5, in the couple's opinion what should sexual relationship be in the marriage?
- According to Eph 5.3, what should be avoided in marital relationship between Christians.

The couple in return could dive deeper into asking questions on the implication of the scriptures mentioned above and reflect on lessons learned from it:

- How can intimacy be developed in marriage?
- How important it is to communicate about sex and intimacy in marriage?
- How important is romance in marriage and each response to it?

6.9 Session 6: Negotiating the partnership roles as husband and wife

6.9.1 Introduction to the topic

We live in a society where women are thought to not have the same cultural significance as males, but as Christians, couples should be empowered to display a different type of marriage partnership. A marriage where both partners view each other as their closest friends should be characterized by mutual respect, love, and support. In such relationships, couples prioritize friendship, ensuring they nurture and maintain a strong emotional connection with one another.

The following topics could be facilitated and address in the session six (6):

- Oneness and equality
When two people marry they become one and the two should strive to treat each other equally as partners (cf. 2.2.5, 2.6, 2.6.3)
- Companionship
In a marriage relationship both husband and wife should complement each other because they companion. If they intend to have children, both partners must work together to provide a nurturing and safe atmosphere for their children's home and family.
- Mutual submission
This means there should be mutual support relationship between husband and wife (cf. 2.13, 2.2.5)

- Husband as head

The husband has a duty to provide for his family and to support his wife. (cf. 2.2.5)

- Wife as a helper

It is the responsibility of the wife to assist and support her husband as God has created them not to compete with the husband but to complement them.

6.9.2 The objective of these session is to:

- Ensure the couple understand the concept of “partnership” in marriage;
- Make the couple to understand the importance of Submission and Love;
- Understand what it means to be a Helper and Provider;
- Agree on marital fidelity.

6.9.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from the Bible could be read: Gen 1:27, Gen 2:18-23, 1 Cor 11:3, Gal 3:28, and Eph 5:21-33.

6.9.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

- What does Gen 1:27 mean when it says that men and women are made in the image of God? What does the Bible say about the relationship between a husband and wife in Genesis 2:18–23? What lesson does Paul impart in 1 Corinthians 11:3?
- In Gal 3:28 Paul is teaching couples to treat partners in respect, honour, and dignity. How can that be achieved?
- What does passage of Eph 5:21 mean by submission?
What does Paul tell women about submitting to their husbands in Ephesians 5:22–24? What advice does God give the husband and wife in Ephesians 5:31–33?

6.9.5 Couple commitment and take-home exercise

The couple could be assigned a take-home task that requires them to have an honest and open conversation about submission issues and their repercussions.

The following discussion topics and questions can be addressed:

- What is appropriate behaviour for a husband and wife to exhibit towards one another? What do you understand about equality between a husband and wife?
- What does it mean to obey Christ? What is the understanding of headship of husband?
- Who is going to play which role in the marriage?
- What action can be taken that will make the couple to be each other's best friend and partner?

6.10 Session 7: Extended Family and Friends

6.10.1 Introduction to the topic

Family background has a big influence on a marriage. In session seven (7) a couple would be empowered to know where to place family and friend in their marriage. The in-laws, family and friends play such an important role in the lives of couples. From the Christian point of view children are raised to respect their parents, and each couple would need the parents blessing in their marriage. However, this should not come to cost peace and happiness in the marriage life of a couple intending to get married.

6.10.2 The objective of these session is:

- To assist a couple on how to relate to the in-laws and siblings after the wedding and during the marriage journey; and
- To assist a couple on how to relate to friends during the marriage journey.

The couple must be reminded that their responsibility is in the first place to each other and not to other people and this includes the relatives. The following discussion points might be covered by the facilitator:

- The possible influence of friends and family on the newlyweds' marriage (cf. 1.6.3, 2.2.2 and 4.8.2)?
- To what extent can the relatives and friends can influence decision making in the newly wedded couple?
- What are consequences of wrong advise that is provided by extended family and friends (cf. 2.2.2 and 4.8.2)?

- To what extent are the relatives and friends allowed to intervene in the challenges of the newly wed couple (cf. 2.2.2 and 4.8.2).

6.10.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: Gen 2:24, Mk 10:6-8, Mt 19:4-6

6.10.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant).

The facilitator may allow the couple to discuss the following questions based on the above relevant Biblical scripture and verses listed:

- What does the Bible mean that “the two shall become one flesh”? in passage of Gen 2:24? (cf. 2.6, 5.3.2).
- What is your understanding that “What God has joined together, let not man separate” as per Mk 10:6-8? (cf. 2.6, 2.6.2).
- Why should a man leave his father and mother and be united with his wife according to Mat 19:4-6? (cf. 2.6, 2.6.2).

6.10.5 Couple commitment and take-home exercise

The couple might be given a take-home activity to explore submission issues and their ramifications in an honest and open manner with one another.

The following issues and questions may be addressed in the take-home exercise:

- How should husbands and wives act towards one other? What does leave and cleave mean to a husband
- What is the understanding the two shall be one flesh?
- Who is going to play which role in the marriage?
- What action can be taken when extended family start interfering in marriage of the newly wedded couple?

6.11 Session 8: Finance and money matters

6.11.1 Introduction to the topic

It is important for couples to understand that by not being transparent with financial matters could be a source of marital problems. Couples should be encouraged to cope with challenging issues, such as money concerns, via effective, open, and honest

conversation. Money and especially the use of it, can be a blessing or a curse to a marriage (Nel, Nienaber and Landman 2005:198).

6.11.2 The objective of these session is:

- To encourage transparency on financial issues/matters;
- Teach about joint budgeting;
- Agree how earning will be spent.

More time would be spent on this important subject. At the end of the session the following would have been explained to the couple:

- How both sides in a marriage can have a different perspective on the worth of money and how that can affect their marriage;
- Assisting the couple in finding a manner to manage their finances that both sides will agree on and feel comfortable with.
- Explanation of the importance of budgeting:
- Assist a couple in creating a reasonable budget.

There are possible ways for a couple suggested by Landman *et al.* (2005:207) to decide how to manage their finances:

- The husband manages the household finances
Under this arrangement, the husband pays all of the bills, chooses how much money should be spent on what, and determines the allowances that each member of the household will receive.
- The wife manages the finances.
Under this arrangement, the woman pays all of the accounts, chooses how much money should be spent on what, and sets the allowances for each member of the household.
- The husband and wife jointly manage the finances
Under this arrangement couple have one bank account in which both parties deposit their income. From this one account all finances are managed. This may be the best way to manage finances to avoid marital conflict as long as both parties have a say in the financial management of the bank account.

- **Management of finances separately**

Under this model, each person is responsible for their own finances. In this system, each individual has his or her own bank account and is accountable for their own budget. Each person contributes his or her fair share to common expenses and savings based on their income level.

- **One party income**

In the scenario where only one person has an income, all expenses must be covered before financial allowances are awarded to both parties and their children.

The most important thing when it comes to the management of finances is that both parties must agree and find consensus on the way they decide to manage their finances.

6.11.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: 1 Tim 3:3; 1 Tim 6:10; Heb 13:5 and 1 Pet 5:2.

6.11.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

The facilitator may allow the couple to discuss the following questions based on the above relevant Biblical scripture and verses listed:

- What does 1 Timothy 3:3 mean and how should Christians view money? What does Paul mean in 1 Timothy 6:10 when he talks about "the love of money"? Based on Heb 13:5, how is it possible to be satisfied with what one has? How should the couple handle their finance? What is the couple's interpretation of the phrase "eager to serve" and how should it be implemented?

6.12 Session 9: Conflict Management

6.12.1 Introduction to the topic

There is an old saying in Setswana "ga gona ntlo e sa neng" (marital problems are unavoidable/ every household has challenges). In this session couples will be empowered and be prepared psychologically for the challenges ahead. Conflicts are

inevitable in every marriage as people are from different backgrounds, priorities, desires, personalities and opinions.

6.12.2 The objective of these session is:

- to demonstrate how best to handle conflicts in a marriage partnership;
- to assist in identifying unresolved hurt;
- Learning to take responsibility and resist the urge to make excuses or to blame your partner.

Handling disagreements takes some skills, and couples will be taught to accept one another, just as Christ did (Romans 15:7). They were cautioned not to sin when angry. Do not allow the sun to set while you are still furious, and do not give the adversary a stronghold (Ephesians 4:26–27). The following will be highlighted as conflict-resolution principles:

- to express appreciation of each other
- to be able to identify and accept differences
- learning to negotiation skills
- learn to grow together in the process be able to openly tell each other what frustrates and hurts them
- Couples must be taught to pray with and for each other since God is their refuge, strength, and ever-present assistance in times of distress (Psalm 46:1). This will let the couple connect with one other in a meaningful way. Summarised colloquially by the saying: “The family that prays together, stays together”.

6.12.3 Biblical verses relevant

The following verses from Bible could be read: Rom 15:7, Mat 7:3, Ps 46:1

6.12.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

- What does passage of Rom 15:7 teaches?
- What does that mean? “Accepting one another?”
- According to Mat 7:3, what is expected from one another and what should be avoided?

- What does the passage Ps 46:1 mean?

6.12.5 Couple commitment and take-home exercise

The couple could be given a take-home exercise to go discuss conflict challenges and its possible impact honestly and openly with each other at home openly.

- Write down six things you appreciate about your partner
- What are your expectations in the marriage journey?
- Do you think they are realistic or unrealistic?
- Discuss, why do you think so?

6.13 Session 10: Communication Management

6.13.1 Introduction to the topic

Couples would receive assistance in communicating during and between sessions. In order for the couple to build intimate marriage relationship they need to hear, listen to each other's experiences, thoughts, feelings, and desires. This will only be achieved through effective communication. There are three aspects in communication namely: speaker (sender), a message (what is being communicated), and the receiver (or listener). Couples would be thought about the importance of talking and listening.

6.13.2 The objective of these session is:

- to understand the importance of communication.
- to establish the art of effective communication.

My dear brothers and sisters: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to talk, and slow to become upset (James 1:19). Those who answer before listening are foolish and shameful (Proverbs 18:13). The following principles for good listening will be highlighted:

- pay attention and do not interrupt;
- try to put yourself in your partner's shoes;
- acknowledge their feelings;
- find out what is most important; and
- help them work out what they might do.

6.13.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: Prov 12:18, Prov 18:13, Eph 4:29, Col 3:8, James 1:19, 1 Pet 3:7.

6.13.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant)

The facilitator could discuss with the couple the following questions on the scriptural passages:

- How each partners understand and interpret Prov 12:18 and what is the lessons that can be learned about marital effective communication?
- What is passage in Prov 18:13 teaches about effective listening?
- What it is the responsibility of both wife and husband to each as per Eph 4:29?
- What do you learn as a couple about usage of words of communication from the passage in Eph 4:29?
- According to James 1:19, in the couple's opinion what is the passage teaching with regards to listening skills?
- According to 1 Pet 3:7, passage encourages husbands to treat their wives?

6.13.5 Couple commitment and take-home exercise

A take-home activity to address communication problems and their potential effects might be offered to the couple, encouraging them to talk candidly and freely with each other at home.

The following are discussion topics and questions that may be tended to:

- How should a husband and wife communicate?
- Why is it important to communicate?
- What are the possible barriers to communication?
- What can be done to bring about good communication between husband and wife?
- How couple can freely communicate about:
 - Sex and family planning and handling of children;
 - Expressing affection and emotions;
 - Church involvement.
 - Relatives and in-laws; and

- Goals and directions in life?
- How good is your communication?
- What are possible bad habits that could hamper effective communication in marriage?

6.14 Session 11: Health Matters including Childlessness

6.14.1 Introduction to the topic

In the last session the facilitator would focus mainly on health matters. As people age and grow they face several health challenges that might be caused by heredity or lifestyle. In the session an awareness of heredity and lifestyle diseases that could negatively affect the marriage. These diseases have potential and consequences that could see couples not enjoying good health and intimacy in marriage being affected and/or a couple not being able to conceive and expect children, i.e. childlessness. Common health problems for men for example are prostate cancer, diabetes, and depression just to mention a few. While common health problems for women are breast cancer, menopause, and depression also just to mention a few.

In African marriage children are very important in marriage [(Baloyi 2013b:3) cf. 1.6, 2.2.3, 2.2.4]. When African couple get married there is an expectation that they should have children failing which a woman would not be given the same respect as the woman with children. However, the most important things are love, companionship, respect, and support given to one another.

6.14.2 The objective of these session is:

- To create awareness of health issues that could pose a challenge later in marriage;
- To educate the couples how best to deal with health challenges in marriage e.g. childlessness in a marriage;
- How to deal with health issues and agreeing on eating and drinking habits later in marriage.

Africans typically believe that the main reason for getting married is to procreate or have children and subsequently, a married couple that is childless may have conflict

in their household. People who are childless frequently dispute about who is more barren than the other. A couple should be informed throughout the session that having children is not the main reason God created marriage. Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 7:3 that although God approved of marriage, having children was not the main goal of such connections. Consequently, a couple would/should be empowered to understand that having children is a blessing from God bestowed upon their marriage.

6.14.3 Relevant Biblical scripture and verses

The following verses from Bible could be read: Gen 1:28, Ps 127:3, Ps 128:3, Mal2:15 and 1 Cor 7:3-5.

6.14.4 Scripture passages discussion and reflections (what does the scripture teach me as a participant).

- What does God say in Gen 1:28 that is of relevance to a married couple?
- What is the meaning and interpretation of this verse? What does Psalm 127:3 imply about childless marriages, or couples who are unable to conceive? What is the couple understanding of Mal 2:15.
What does 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 say about the role of sex in marriage? Is procreation the primary concern?

6.14.5 Couple commitment and take-home exercise

The couple could be provided with a take-home activity asking the couple to honestly and freely address health-related problems with each other.

The following could be discussed and reflected on and on what the couple have learnt from it:

- Africans have always believed that the primary motive for marriage is to have children in order to establish one's adulthood. Is this wrong or correct, and what does the Bible say?
- How best can the couple deal with failure to get pregnant and childlessness in marriage?
- What is the purpose of marriage and what is your opinion on procreation?

- Without kids, is a marriage still considered complete? Can a childless marriage be supported by the extended family? How is the couple going to support each other when life diseases affect them?
- Importance of love between husband and wife, and how can the pair love, respect, and honour each other even if they are unable to produce children?
- Can the couple deal with the pressure that is put on them by extended family and community in general?

6.15 Conclusion

The proposed premarital counselling programme focuses on the 11 main areas that have potential of affecting marital journey if they are not dealt with from the start. The programme attempt to deal with the challenges of married couples as mention in 4.1 namely: Conflict resolution and difficulties; close versus extended family; creating a family vision and mission; money concerns; intimacy problems; and family planning; managing communication in a marriage; participants' comprehension or lack thereof of the difficulties of premarital counselling; the role the Church played; difficulties and their efficacy; and the significance of premarital counselling should all be taken into account. Each area is address in this manner: introduction to topic, objective of the session, relevant Biblical scriptures, reflections and scriptures discussions, and couple commitment, take-home exercise. The main aim of the programme is to proactive attempt to prevent potential marriage problems and provide guidelines how to deal and solve them. The next chapter provides summary of conclusions and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6, theories derived from the research of eighteen individuals were presented and supported by the literature under certain themes. The participants' perceptions of premarital counselling from the church, or lack thereof; the Church's role in offering premarital counselling and its efficacy; the difficulties resulting from a lack of counselling or its absence; the possible significance of premarital counselling if it were taken into consideration; and recommendations were some of these themes discussed. A summary of the study, results, limits, and suggestions based on the data is given in this last chapter.

7.2 Overview of the study

The research was carried out with a view to attempt to develop a model/framework that would help to do the following:

- Establish a strong foundation for marriage;
- Prevent and/or alleviate the potentially high rate of divorces; and
- Facilitate an environment in which there are relevant intervention strategies, that will help strengthen marriages and prevent or minimise the possibility of divorce.

The primary goals and objectives in the research project were to search and/or develop a marriage preparation model or process that would:

- Assist would-be couples to talk about issues that might not have come up while they were dating, such as finance, family planning, parenting/raising children, communication and conflict management resolutions;
- Build skills and provide strategies to overcome tough times in the marriage journey;
- Develop a better understanding of marriage as a divine institution or as an institution established by God as Christians understand it;

- Evaluate and deepen their understanding of their readiness to embark on married life; and
- Assist would-be couples to get a better understanding of themselves as individuals and as a couple.

The study tour question used was: How and to what extent does the URCSA (referring to the Minister who is solemnising the marriage) make an effort to adequately prepare the would-be couples intending to get married by using an integrated, premarital, pastoral care preparation model and/or process that assists to:

- Prepare black couples for a married life;
- Build their confidence to enter into married life; and
- Provide marriage skills that will help to build sustainable marriages?

The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach and included 18 participants from a URCSA congregation in the Northern Synod Region of Pretoria, Gauteng Province. The participants included individuals who were still married, separated, or divorced. Themes that emerged from the data were used to describe the phenomenon under investigation. Most importantly, the above-mentioned study objectives were accomplished.

7.3 Summary of the research findings

7.3.1 Understanding of premarital counselling by participants and/or a lack thereof

It came to the attention of the researcher that there was no understanding or a different understanding of premarital counselling. It also emerged that participants had different expectations from it. Some participants referred to it as a contract. Some were exposed to it through charismatic churches, and to them in the Sesotho tradition is about *go laaya ngwetsi* (ceremony where the bride and groom are taught about roles of wives and husbands by a council made up of parents, uncles, and aunts). One participant indicated that the mainline church did not offer premarital counselling and it was lacking. One participant said the church did not teach them much about marriage, but more emphasis and efforts were placed on the wedding day celebration rather than preparing them for marriage. One participant was of the opinion that if the

church prepared them well for the marriage journey, they would not have been experiencing their current marriage challenges of communication and conflict management. Participants felt there were no lessons they learned from the church which are instilled in them to positively contribute towards their marriage. Premarital counselling would have cleared a number of differences in the couples relating to spirituality, finance, and family matters, taking into account couples meet and are from different denominations and African indigenous cultures. Premarital counselling would have assisted them in understanding what they were getting themselves into. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches are offering counselling, but it is lacking in the mainline churches.

7.3.2 The role the Church played in premarital counselling and its effectiveness

Couples indicated that premarital counselling is a must and announcing the marriage intention of the couple did not assist much. According to them, the process was not very effective as the couple would meet once or twice with the Minister or Church Council and all that would be discussed was the administrative part of the wedding. Some would have liked the Church and Clergy to go deeper into explaining the subject of marriage to make them understand what was happening in the marriage, what challenges to expect and how to deal with them. With the escalating divorce rate in society and challenges that couples are experiencing after the wedding day, it shows that what the Church is offering couples were not effective.

7.3.3 Challenges experienced due to a lack of premarital counselling or not going through it

7.3.3.1 Conflict management and communication

Due to a lack of preparation, some couples found it very difficult to deal with conflicts when they surfaced. One participant said when they were going through a rough patch, she went back home to share with her mother. She actually wanted to move back with her parents. However, the mother intervened by giving her advice and reminding her that if the husband wanted to divorce her, she would have done it long ago. So the fact that he is still at home with her meant that there was still hope in their marriage. So a family support system is important where there are differences in couples as they may show some blind spots that the couples missed or did not see. One of the main

courses of conflict is the issue of pride. In some cases one partner swallowed their pride for quite some time but the other did not. One problem led to the other, up to point were the one who was swallowing their pride decided they could not do so any longer. This led to marriage breakup.

7.3.3.2 Extended family and relatives

The issue of extended family must be managed with care. When two people marry, they bring both their families together. In some instances, extended relatives when they see flashy wedding celebrations, they always assume that the marrying couple have lots of money. One couple indicated that after their wedding, relatives started asking them for money left, right and centre. Therefore, boundaries need to be drawn so that the relatives know to what extent they can go, particularly after the wedding when the couple is still settling down and trying to create a family.

7.3.3.3 Developing a vision and mission for the family or failure thereof

It was indicated by one couple that they did not think that far ahead and as a result they had no vision where they were heading and what they wanted to accomplish with their marriage. Now if anyone does not know where they are going, any road will lead them there.

7.3.3.4 Finances

The issue of finance is a thorny one in couples. With the misunderstanding of the role of the man as a provider and now with women empowerment, there are big challenges that need intervention. Couples must be coached on finance management. One participant said many marriages break up because couples are not financially intelligent. Abundance of money, and/or a lack thereof, causes lots of fighting between couples. It was recommended that the issue of finances be dealt with thoroughly during the premarital counselling, as the number one factor contributing to divorces is money matters.

7.3.3.5 Intimacy issues and family planning

The issue of sex plays a very important role in gluing the couple together. One participant advised that girl children and women in the church should be educated around the issue of sex. A lack of sex in marriages, in some instances lead husbands

to look for extra-marital affairs and committing sex outside marriage or even making children outside wedlock. The couples must be schooled about the issues of intimacy and family planning according to the Word of God. Men also need to be made aware of what their wives go through after giving birth to children and how long it takes for them to start becoming intimate again.

7.3.4 Importance of the premarital counselling if it could be considered and recommendations

All couples acknowledged the importance of the premarital counselling, even though they had different understandings thereof. They value it and are of the opinion that it would save many marriages and create a happy family that creates a better society. All highly recommended roll-out thereof in the URCSA. This calls for an integrated and holistic narrative-hermeneutical premarital counselling model within the URCSA.

7.4 Limitations of the study

The Northern Synod Region's single URCSA congregation served as the backdrop for this qualitative study. Open-ended questions and an inductive methodology were employed by the researcher, therefore generalisation to other URCSA congregations would be precluded. Understanding the breadth of concerns involved in prenuptial care and support as well as ongoing marital care and support may be possible, even though generalisation may not be achievable.

7.5 Contribution of the study

Ministers and Church Council members generally play critical roles in the lives of the members of the congregation. They are highly respected in the church community and therefore need to be empowered and upskilled to be able to do counselling. Furthermore, pastoral care and counselling education should be prioritised within the URCSA. The contribution of this study was that a need for pastoral care, counselling and a marriage preparation programme was identified in terms of preparing couples for their marriage journey.

Participants were able to reveal their frustrations and challenges due to not being fully prepared for their marriage. There is also a need to equip and upskill the church leaders with knowledge of pastoral care.

The findings helped with making recommendations for a proper marriage preparation process and programme. The institution of marriage is under pressure with all the social economic challenges, therefore counselling interventions should be prioritised as offerings to church members. The structured premarital counselling programme, which will be developed and incorporated in the URCSA, will improve marriages and family lives of the many members, and increase positive views of the marriage institution.

7.6 Recommendations for future research

From the research findings, it is quite clear, as indicated by all the issues raised by the participants, that the URCSA needs a proper premarital preparation process for couples intending to marry. The matter requires serious attention. Based on the research findings, the researcher makes the following recommendations that would be helpful to couples before they commit and starting the marriage journeys:

1. Marriage should be an essential component of the congregation's religious education program, from Sunday school to the Ministry level. The scope and level of this curriculum should be tailored to the kids' ages as they progress from one class to the next. For junior high and high school students, the marriage union,
2. A module for Pastoral Counselling and Marriage preparation programme should be developed for the Northern Theological Seminary (NTS) in order to ensure that future Ministers of the Word are well prepared and equipped with counselling skills. For Ministers who are already in practice, crash courses/upskilling workshops should be considered.
3. There is a need to equip and train Church Council members and congregation members about the importance of premarital counselling and counselling in general. This should include teaching about the origin of marriage and why God created marriage.

4. There is a need for a marriage preparation curriculum with the URCSA for the following segments of memberships: members marrying for the first time, and those who were previously married. The curriculum should cover the following:
 - a. Spiritual preparation;
 - b. What the Bible teaches about marriage;
 - c. How to build a sustainable marriage;
 - d. Communication and conflict management;
 - e. Finance management;
 - f. Intimacy issues (sex) and family planning;
 - g. Dealing with extended families;
 - h. How to avoid marriage potholes;
 - i. Skills to detect the early signs of marriage deterioration; and
 - j. Marriage failures, indissolubility of marriage and divorce.

7.7 Conclusion

the research investigation with a summary and conclusion. The result was based on the literature review and data gathered through an empirical investigation involving participants. The interviews with the participants were particularly helpful to provide recommendations that would hopefully improve the URCSA approach to pastoral care and counselling in general. The URCSA needs an integrated holistic narrative hermeneutical premarital counselling model.

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ANNEXURE A: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

P.O. Box 40488

Moreletapark

0044

Dear Sir/ Madam

You are invited to take part in a research study towards a PhD, the title of which is: A search for a premarital preparation model for couples in Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) Congregation. The researcher is inviting couples who are currently married, separated and/or divorced to be part of the study.

This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher:

Rev Moeketsi P. Matsepe - PhD student at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Contact details: 083 376 6789

Email: phops.matsepe@gmail.com

Background Information:

This research attempts to search for a relevant, integrated, premarital preparation pastoral care model that can be developed and practised in the context of XXXXXXXX URCSA. At this stage, there is no model of premarital or standardised process that Ministers of the word follow before solemnising couples' marriages.

The research attempts to address the following research problem:

- Inadequate marriage preparation process and/ or lack thereof within URCSA
- Perceived lack of proper marriage pre-counselling and coaching skills among the Clergy.

Purpose of the study

The primary goal and objective of the research project is to search and/or develop marriage preparation model or process that would:

- assist couples to talk about issues that may not have come up while they were dating, such as finance, raising children, family backgrounds and conflict resolution
- to build skills and provide strategies to overcome tough times in the marriage journey
- to develop a better understanding of marriage as a sacrament
- to evaluate and deepen their understanding of their readiness to live a married life
- to assist couples to get a better understanding of themselves as individuals and as a couple

Procedures: If you agree to be part of this study, you will be informed of the following:

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is completely voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. Additionally, this study is completely anonymous, so no one will know if you did or did not participate. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study would not pose any risk to your safety or well-being.

The benefits of the study include voicing your opinions, thoughts and concerns regarding the premarital preparation process of URCSA as experienced.

Benefits

Participation in this research will not yield any immediate benefit to you as a participant, but to the future generations of the congregation.

The benefit gained will assist the researcher to better understand the challenges of marriage preparation, in view of contributing to a body of knowledge that will inform pastoral ministry with the congregation.

Payment

and there will be no reimbursement or payment for time.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by password protection and data encryption. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the University.

Contacts and Questions: If you have questions now or at a later time, you may contact the researcher, Moeketsi P Matsepe, phops.matsepe@gmail.com. You can ask any questions you have before you begin the actual interview.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above information provided and had the opportunity to ask questions. I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. Furthermore, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any justification and without any cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of the consent form.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Participant's name

_____ Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature _____

Date:

ANNEXURE B: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

P.O. Box 40488

Moreletapark

0044

30 June 2021

Dear Sir/ Madam

APPLICATION: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY FOR PhD

I would like to request permission from the Church Council of XXXXXX URCSA to conduct research study within the congregation.

Background Information:

This research attempts to search for a relevant, integrated, premarital preparation pastoral care model that can be developed and practised in the context of XXXXXX URCSA. At this stage, there is no model of premarital or standardised process that Ministers of the word follow before solemnising couples' marriages.

The research attempts to address the following research problem:

- Inadequate marriage preparation process and/ or lack thereof within URCSA
- Perceived lack of proper marriage pre-counselling and coaching skills among the Clergy.

Purpose of the study

The primary goal and objective of the research project is to search and/or develop a marriage preparation model or process that would:

- assist couples to talk about issues that may not have come up while they were dating, such as finance, raising children, family backgrounds and conflict resolution
- to build skills and provide strategies to overcome tough times in the marriage journey
- to develop a better understanding of marriage as a sacrament
- to evaluate and deepen their understanding of their readiness to live a married life
- to assist couples to get a better understanding of themselves as individuals and as a couple

Procedures: If the Church Council agree and approve the study, the participants will be informed of the following:

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is completely voluntary and if any member or participant decides to join the study now, they can still change their mind later and stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study would not pose a risk to any participant’s safety or wellbeing.

The benefits of the study include voicing your opinions, thoughts and concerns regarding the premarital preparation process of URCSA as experienced.

Benefits

Participation in this research will not yield any immediate benefit to you as a participant, but to the future generations of the congregation.

The benefit gained will assist the researcher to better understand the challenges of marriage preparation in view of contributing to a body of knowledge that will inform pastoral ministry with the congregation.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside this research project.

I hope you will find this in order.

Yours faithfully

Rev MP Matsepe

ANNEXTURE C: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY



UNITING REFORMED

VERENIGENDE

CHURCH IN GEREFORMEERDE KERK

SOUTHERN AFRICA

IN SUIDER-AFRIKA

NORTHERN SYNOD

NOORD SINODE

Uniting Reformed Church

Secretary: XXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Cell: XXXXXXXXXXXX

Ref: 31/07/2021

To: Rev MP Matsepe

FROM: XXXXXXXXXXXX Congregation Church Council

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY FOR A PhD

Dear Reverend Matsepe

We greet you from XXXXXXXXXXXX in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The XXXXXXXXXXXX, under the leadership of the Church Council, wishes to inform you that your application to conduct research study within the congregation has been approved.

We pray for more abundance of God's blessings to your studies.

Yours in Christ

Secretary

XXXXXXXXXX

ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Tell me about your marriage vision, if it was ever thought of?
2. What is your understanding of premarital counselling? And your views on it?
3. As you were preparing for your wedding, did the church conduct premarital counselling for you as a couple?
4. If so, what role did the church play to prepare you for your marriage journey?
5. In your opinion, what role do you think the Church should have played?
 - a. Talk to me/Tell me about that role
6. In your opinion did the Church prepare you well for your Marriage Journey or not?
 - a. Follow up: Why do say that?
7. What is your understanding of roles as Husband and Wife (what are their roles)
8. What is the current practice in the Church when a person indicates they want to marry?
9. What your comment of its effectiveness of the process the Church took you through?
10. In every marriage there is always be a degree of conflict due to differing personalities and/or external pressures, please elaborate on Conflict Management strategies you follow to resolve differences?
11. How has the Marriage journey been like so far (road travelled)?
12. How Did the Church process assist if it did?
13. What Challenges have you encountered so far?
14. What is your expectation and where can the Church improve?

ANNEXURE E: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Allocated number	Race	Age	Gender	Marriage Status	Occupation
Participant Number 1	African	58	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 2	African	56	Female	Married	Manager
Participant Number 3	African	59	Male	Separated	Teacher
Participant Number 4	African	48	Female	Separated	Unemployed
Participant Number 5	African	45	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 6	African	39	Female	Married	Manager
Participant Number 7	African	56	Female	Divorced	Director
Participant Number 8	African	52	Female	Separated	Manager
Participant Number 9	African	53	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 10	African	50	Female	Married	Manager
Participant Number 11	African	50	Female	Married	HOD
Participant Number 12	African	30	Male	Married	Unemployed
Participant Number 13	African	25	Female	Married	Teacher
Participant Number 14	African	33	Male	Married	Manager
Participant Number 15	African	28	Female	Married	Teacher
Participant Number 16	African	35	Male	Separated	Teacher
Participant Number 17	African	33	Female	Separated	Unemployed
Participant Number 18	African	28	Male	Divorced	Clerk

ANNEXURE F: VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTS EXAMPLE

PARTICIPANT 1 and 2 – Married Couple 1

I - Researcher

H – Husband

W – Wife

I: I would like to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to engage with me. I have made copies of the consent form that explains the objective of my studies and also give assurance that your names won't be mentioned in the study. It will be just participant 3 and there is no costing or money to be paid to you or me, you are just assisting me to complete my studies. So, my studies is to develop a marriage preparation model that will assist the church. If we can have that, number of divorces will go down.

I: May I ask of your ages, occupation, qualifications

H: 42, Processing engineer, BTech Industrial

W: 37, Specialist Fraud Investigator (ABSA) Diploma

I: How long have you married for

W: 9yrs

I: How long have you known each other

W: From 2007, 14yrs

I: How many kids do you have

W: 2 boys

I: Have some questions that I will be asking. Obviously, the purpose of the research is to understand pre-marital preparation processes from the perspective of a married couple. Also, to understand what is your needs in your marriage. Let's look at before and now.

W: I understand your question, but I think individually, we will have different needs and I believe that our needs won't be 100% the same but we end up comprising. Before re ba mo lenyalong, bana ba ne ba se teng, things were different, it was just about us. So mo lenyalong there's many things that played a role. Expenses and responsibilities were not too much then.

H: When you say needs, in relation to what

I: Just in life general

W: we are always looking to improve in our personal lives so that at least our finances di kgone go namella and re kgone go meet kids expectations and manage the household properly where everyone is also comfortable. Before those things were not there, it was just a few things that we had obligation towards. Go ne go le easy go fitlhella dilo.

H: The more you grow mo lenyalong, the more your financial needs di oketsega, you don't get go fitlha mo o batlang teng but I think financial needs is something se se phelang se le teng until you get the financial freedom. Generally even le emotionally we are there for each other, we support le bana, so there is not a lack in terms of emotional needs or support.

W: I know a lot of couples find it difficult to really bring the financial aspect when it comes to marriage. Rona I think it just became natural when we got together. It was never something we sat down and discuss to say you will do this.

H: No we did that in the beginning and we stucked to it.

I: How did you meet

H: The first time I saw her, both of us re ne re tswa mmerekong, ra ema mo di robotong tsa Deneboom. I looked at her and I said there is my wife, ke sa mo itse. We both left and never met again until ko mmerekong. Ke ne ke bereka le cousin ya gage and her cousin said I want you to meet my cousin. I think the two of you le ka ba sharp. After work ka tla ko SNS, eish motho a ndraisa, a sa battle go tswa so ke dutse nako e telle ke emetse motho. She came after a long time and from there we became friends but on and off, re loosa contact and will talk over the phone, di email and sms. Friendship groom and by then she told me gore I can not go out le wena because both re na le di

partners. So I don't do that until re ba free re tla kopantsa something. After mo, we lost touch gape until we came back. Re ne re sa jole until space sa bo two years until re kopana gape re le single. We exchange number and called each other.

W: Ke ne ke drive going home and I think ke na le problem ya matlho but wena ke ne ke go bona. So I saw him next to the garage ya total, so I called him, parked the car, gave him a hug and gave him my number and asked him to call me.

H: We met through her cousin.

W: Cousin played a huge role, nna I don't think I would have agreed gore a tle, if I'd known gore o na le motho, so he had told him gore ga ke na motho, le ena a mmotsa the same. So we met thinking gore both we were single.

I: So you decided to take your relationship to the next level, so what was the vision of your marriage.

W: To remain friends (1st), I think le mo moretele view the used to call us twins because we were always together and that was key to us. Even when we got into marriage, to never changed towards each other. That way everything became natural that I feel for this guy, whatever he is going through I feel for this guy because he is my friend and it always been like that.

H: to grow old together, that is something that we always talk about. And to be in the marriage that is not boring, we can sit for days in the house, go se na ko re yang and we will be ok because we like the same things, we compromise, nna ke motho wa strata, ena ke motho wa montlung but we find the balance, if nna ke re lets go somewhere, we will go, if a re let stay in we do stay in so we find the balance. But in terms of the vision it was to build something sustainable to be in the marriage mo e leng gore e tlo go re enable to grow old together.

W: Also to put ourselves first before everything because if this was to break down the unit itself le yona ya phuthama. So it is very important and we have proven this so many times to a lot of challenges that we have overcame and another thing that we remain closer to each other is that we want it better ka moo rona re godileng ka teng. Both of us re godile into a broken marriages and want to give that to our kids.

I: What is your understanding ya pre-marital counselling?

W: The reason re gopola Ntate ola ko Marriage seminar, was that o ne a bua something that is relatable. If the counselling session can be relatable to our every day life, it can be fine. In that way, it is not going to be easy for a person to forget.

I: I want to park that one of the marriage enrichment seminar. My focus is on the role the church played in assisting to prepare you well for the journey. How many sessions did you go to?

W: I only remember just that one day when we went to Silverton ga Moruti Sefara

H: A month before, if my memory serves me well, I think we did like a month, but once a week something like that. I remember re ne re ya ko kerekeng in the afternoon a sa bereka Lompack. We used to go to church but it was like those once in a week.

I: How long was the sessions

H: 30 minutes to an hour

I: What did you discuss

W: We want to give you the information but we don't remember and it is not to put in a bad word against the person o neng a re counsella but I think in order for whatever you are doing in PHD o kgone go kreiya the sense of a real-life story. It is not going to help if re tlo tliisa information e ne e se teng.

H: In all honesty we can't remember. Nna that is why ke go botsa gore the reason ke sa gopole is because it was sort of from the passages. Reading the passage individually.

W&H: I don't think nke be re di attendile, it was more like a formality, gore you have to, if you want to get married ko Dutch, you must do this thing. It was like a class gore you must go to a class ba le rute ka lenyalo. But when you get, it was more like a tick box, le tlile and lo nyala. I remember le gore there was a book mo ba neng ba kwala. Mara ga go na a lessone nkareng when we were there, ga re ne re tswa it was like.

W: We never even spoke about it. That's how it was. And because re ne re sa le much younger, It really did not bother us to go to an extend ya gore mara this thing ga di re thuse ebile ga re gaine the effectiveness ya the process.

I: The question that I was going to ask that you have already answered is to comment on the effectiveness of that process and what I am hearing ke gore you can't remember. There is nothing that you have brought into your current marriage life.

W: If someone has made you different, you will never forget

I: To make it much simpler, palatable and consumable, maybe we can talk about that enrichment seminar you attended. By the way, the professor that is supervising me was one of the presenters. The other one spoke about marriage counselling and the other one spoke about the school of marriage.

W: We were so happy, ge re tswa moo there was excitement. Sa le wa bona o le fulfilled, o le proud I am in this thing called marriage.

H: For rona what's more encouraging ke gore when you go to a seminar and there is sort of ascertain, they assure you gore you are on the right path. If they are talking things that you are already doing so e ba nthoela ya gore is like a rubber stamp, you feel good about your marriage. The effectiveness of that seminar is because of we were in a formal set up, something different se re sa se tlwaelang. Its like on its own, is something se e leng gore it put you at ease. Now I am here to enjoy. It should be the same as when you get prepared for lenyalo ko kerekeng. You need to be not in the formalized set up ya ko kerekeng, ka gore le rona that is how we felt gore ro ya ka mola, ro tsaya ditulo re dule and listen to Ntate Sefara.

W&H: It was not a dialogue kind of a set up, we could not relate.

W: Be in the level of the person in need of the counselling. We are not free to ask question, we are scared Ntate Moruti le ena is formal because already he is trying to maintain, maybe ke ka moo a batlang go bonwa ka teng. It is not a friendly kind of interaction le the couple. So it makes it difficult. Even if you do not understand something, you are afraid to ask. Le ge go balwa, you mind is elsewhere e boe gape o try go retsa what is said. So for both parties there is no effort. I think lack of effort, is what I have noticed when it comes to the counselling sessions that we went through.

I: How has been your marriage journey so far, taking to consideration that preparation process. I know you mentioned earlier on that some other things you cannot bring them to where your are.

W: I think we have seen all seasons but as I have mentioned, we come first before any other person whether it is his family or mine as a unit.

H: One thing I can tell you, whenever re tsena ka gate, if our marriage was just between us and kids without any 3rd parties, beautiful, but our storms ups and downs is because of the external forces/ 3rd parties maybe ke dira something and she does not agree with it, e affect rona montlung. So this external factors they always create storms but over and above I think nna le ena we always find our way back to us because re sa kgone go phela without each other. La nka mo kwatisa jang, ultimately somewhere somehow, we will always find our way back. Nna honestly till today, I am still enjoying our marriage. Our journey has been tough it has been smooth.

W&H: Not gore bo tough bo, has been me and him, no. just because of the external factors. Remember we are friends and re phela re le babedi. Mo a leng ke teng. It is never about dilo tse nna kapa yena a di dirileng. I don't recall re lwa because of dilo tse so. It is always external factors (dichomi) but between the two of us normally is never been we can not stand each other. WE communicate, we handle things as partnership. We share things, we have an understanding in terms of our marriage.

W: I think I have been longing for the kind of man he is, very gentle and considerate and loving, giving me attention, time. He is just an all rounded kind of a person. Ga ke kgone go e kgotsafalla because I still want more. So for me it is an never ending kind of love that grows with each year. I prayed for a man like him. I was specific gore ke batla motho o mo bjeyang. Like you have mentioned ka your colleague, le nna Modimo o ntliseditse which is why a llateletse ko gae for all the way from Klerksdorp to XXXXXX. So far for me it is still beautiful.

I: What other challenges have you encountered in general, relate to pre-marital counselling. Had this been done, this would not have happened, something like that.

W: Family members tsa rena, ba re bona re le batho ba chelete only because we plan wisely nna le ena. So di challenges would be re kgona go kopiwa chelete left right and centre. I think the one thing I will never do ke gore ga ke na chelete. Whatever little thing we have we share. In a nutshell di family members ke tsona our biggest challenge. 90% ke di family members and I think if go ka etsiwa aware ka di in-laws, just to be aware gore you will go through it, e se gore ga ba re rate, to better prepare

us. Gore this are the challenges we might face mo lenyalong in terms of the support they might expect from me as makoti and nna ka nako eo ga ke kgone go di fitlhella. Or sometimes ke feel gore ke a difitlhella bona ba feel gore ga se tsona. Dilo tse di jalo. If ba ka di tsenya in the preparation process before di couple di nyala. At least di go fa a glimpse ya gore what you might expect and if etla e ka se tle as a shock ka gore ntate moruti o boletse ka yona.

H: Wa bona one thing in the bible that is used more often but in reality, it is not an easy thing. E e reng monna o tla kreiya mosadi, a tlogela bagabo a go aga motlotlwana wa gage. That make sense but it does not need to be explained ka gore e straightforward. But it is not an easy thing especially in black culture. You can not detach. Not to say detach. I think most of rona especially in the black community where before you start your life, o start ko morago ko gaeno, go lokisa mo your parents ba shortileng mo teng. When you think ok I have picked up, it is my time to move forward, bona ke gona ba tlwaelang gore no but you have been doing 123 for us. So e ba le dipuo gore mosadi o wa go tseya, o batla go ja chelete a le one. No. it can't happen like that. So it is not a simple thing to implement in life like the bible say.

Secondly, nna le ena, I think a lot of things we had to learn by ourselves. Teaching one another. Maybe if it was part of counselling you can relate for e.g. ka di finances. Before you get the formula right, re ne re lwana ka di finance but we have moved on. We are 90% better. We had to teach ourselves gore in order to prosper in this thing, let us handle this thing this way. We had to teach ourselves to communicate.

P: So do you think pre-marital counselling would have played a role had it covered all that.

W: Definitely.

H: Remember the pre-marital counselling has to be in relatable fashion ya gore, we need to be given exercises. Here is the scenario le na le R1000 and your mother o need R800 and le na le ngwana what are you going to do and ko ntlung go na le this and that. Tsamaya and come back and tell us what are you going to do as a couple until you pass.

W: in that way le ge couple e tsena mo lenyalong ka whatever date they have set, you are comfortable as a councilor gore ba mo the right path, a ke bone gore ba ka divorce.

H: Anything e e nang le the pre also need to have the post. Because o re preparile, ra celebrate, what now, are you guys implementing what you learned. Then it becomes those case studies.

I: If you had to give a recommendation, with the experience that you went through, where do you think the church must improve. Areas of improvement as far as preparation process goes.

W: I think we have mentioned a lot of them

I: I will pick it up from the recording. But in your opinion if you had to recommend to me, in order this has to be effective this is what you should you do. If someone comes tomorrow and wants to get married, in order for improvement, 3 or 4 things that you think are key.

W: Decisions di be relatable.

H: Must be real. Is there a syllabus to teach about marriage.

I: You see this gap says to me we need to teach about marriage. At the moment we don't dedicate time on this things and now post should actually be able to give you ammunition to propel you to the next level. So it something that clearly on the recommendation one should say it does not stop there ko pre-marital counselling. In fact it has to go on and on.

H: The reason I say we don't teach about marriage, a lot of us think that marriage is the celebration. For rona marriage ke the wedding day. Everything build up to the wedding day and you have to do all of this things leading to that day. When the day comes, we are happy and have achieved. But the following week when marriage starts it is not something that you signed for. No one prepared you, no one took time to make you understand gore this is what marriage is all about. Our knowledge of marriage is based on manyalo ao re a bonang. So what we know ke gore manyalo a fail, so even lenyalo la gago le le on the rocks, it is ok because you have seen marriage di faila and it expected. We do not get to be taught about marriage as young adult le ko kerekeng.

I: Do you think the church should play a big role.

H: Yes it should. When there is woman's month, the focus is on them. Nou go tla di wedding seasons, mara ko kerekeng it is not a topic gore guys ke the wedding seasons. What do you know about weddings, what do you know about marriages. We don't know to be taught about such things.

I: so you are thrown to the deep end, and you must swim out

W: If wena and your partner got married for the wrong reasons or you cant bring yourselves as individuals to become one, then ke mathata fela.

I: Any other comments ka pre-marital counselling

W&H: my biggest thing ke gore, it needs to be memorable or I need to remember. Yes it has to have impact in my life. Be impactful. I should have after that session maybe nke be ba re file buka with verses, things that when you are down and out. You take the book and read. If you go through financial issues you able to refer to the scripture. E be a sort of a directory to guide you. And having the book, o kgona le go thusa bana ba gago. You can teach yourself and share knowledge with friends.

W: You know I remember the hardship we went through and it is good to note gore I have someone to fight the battle with. We had dreams and we worked towards getting better every day. If couples will not get married for the wrong reasons, I think young people are no longer hungry, ke status go nyalwa. Ba e dira gore le nna ke fitile moo. Ga ke le fetwa and those things di pusha gore young ones ba tsene mo lenyalong ba se ready. So the success ya marriage di ka blooma.

I: it is so shocking to see the rate ya divorce in a black community lately. Ge re gola this thing re ne re e bona mo makgoeng now the tables have turned around. We have the highest divorce rate.

H: How does the church deal with a couple, lets say I am part of the church and ke tlike ka mpeto ka kopa moruti gore o nnyadise but my wife to be ga a tsene kereke. How does the church deal with scenarios like that.

I: under normal circumstances if wena o tsena uniting, and mosadi o kena ko Anglican. All the procession and formalities di tla etsiwa ko Anglican. Now in case mme ga a tsene kereke, an arrangement could be made gore we make her and accept her as a member of the church and sometimes to be accepted as a member of the church you

need to prove that you are were member of the church before go fitlha ka di certificate tsa gore o ne o le a member of the church ko Lutheran church. In this case there is nothing, we take the person and re mo tsenya mo class and le be le graduatisa from the class. Gore o feditse re mo rutille molao and all things tsa kereke and then we are happy gore they can be accepted as members of the church. After converted as a member le ka mo nyadisa. That is what I will do if a person a re nna ga ken a kereke and ke batla go nyala. In future the model e ke e e tsayang, they will have to go through it so that we get them to be ready for the journey ya marriage.

H: When the models comes ka taba tsa go prepara. I like what you said gore o ka re nkebe o tshwere video. We need to have this kind of things gore in one of the sessions the people ba ba tlileng watch the video of people that came through the preparations.

I: Coming back to the seminar, I think it was the highlight ya some of the initiatives that I brought into the church. Some people were very skeptical when I spoke about it. WE also have many challenges in marriages, we don't talk about them freely because ke nagana gore ge nka bua ka ona, the person can talk to others ka ona. Kgante we should learn from each other. We need to create enabling environment within the church. That is why ke ratang go bua gore sometimes people do not understand the role of the church gore it is very impactful. And we come to church only on Sunday and close it and again on Sunday, kgante it should be a lifestyle and then our kids should know that as a reformist/ reformation or person coming from the reformed church, this is our position. This are the things that we need to teach in church. There is a Belhar confession which talks about unity and reconciliation. Bring it to the day to day experiences in life so that people when they encounter problems they bring the lesson from the church into their marriage. It is a process, let us see what happens. Five years, the ship stabilized. I have tried many things- golf day, I wanted to see the reaction, to test the appetite and agility. I saw gore go na le potential. I am now in the position that I can confidently say there is stability and covid happened but otherwise, that thing ya marriage enrichment, we should do it again.

W: I think people are scared of the unknown. People ga ba amogele change moroba

I: Thank you very much, and I will come back to you with my result. I am picking things to include in the framework. Thanks.

PARTICIPANT 2 – Married Couple

PARTICIPANT 3 – Married Couple but separated

PARTICIPANT 4 – Married Couple

PARTICIPANT 5 – Divorced

PARTICIPANT 6 – Divorced

PARTICIPANT 7 – Married but separated

ANNEXTURE G: STEPS IN DATA COLLECTION – CHAPTER 3

1. Creating an aide memoir or interview guide. Walker (1985:5) and Jean Morton-Williams (1985:10) specify that the guide should only be used as a guide, not as a prop.
2. The aide memoir will include a list of topics to be covered, which may be organized with headings and a number of sub-topics that may be posed as questions under each heading (Jean Morton-Williams in Walker 1985:31), Sue Jones in Walker 1985:47, Peil 1985:123).
3. The interview is not restricted by a formal questionnaire meant to ensure that all respondents are asked the same questions in exactly the same way (Walker in Walker 1985:4).
4. Constant consultation with fundamental concepts of in-depth interview data collection procedures. Always have such concepts in the back of one's mind.
5. Select a random sample. Remember that participants are chosen objectively and not to be friends or acquaintances (Jean Morton-Williams, Walker 1985:30).
6. The sample selection will not follow the rigorous sampling processes associated with quantitative research. According to Jean Morton-Williams (Walker 1985:30), “the rigorous sampling procedure in qualitative research are inappropriate to the nature of qualitative work”.
7. Letters asking prospective participants to participate (Annexure A). The letter should explain the purpose of the study and give an estimate of how long the interview will take (Peil 1985:123). It is estimated to take between 45 and 60 minutes.
8. Ensure that there are no distractions during interviews.

ANNEXTURE H: PRINCIPLES REGARDING DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSES – CHAPTER 3

(These concepts should be kept in mind and used as a constant reference during data gathering, processing, and analysis. And should ideally be appended to the aid memoir.)

1. Data analysis is the act of organizing, structuring, and interpreting large amounts of acquired data (Marshall & Rossman 1999: 150).
2. Qualitative data analysis seeks broad generalizations regarding links between data categories; it contributes to the development of grounded theory.
3. Qualitative data analysis is the process of making sense of the data, determining its structure, and providing meaning and significance to the researcher and any relevant audience (Sue Jones in Walker 1985:4).
4. There are no precise guidelines for processing and evaluating qualitative data that two researchers can follow to assure that they reach identical findings regarding a piece of data (Sue Jones in Walker 1999:56).
5. The analysis of enormous amounts of data is a difficult task. Because volumes of data are largely unstructured, it is the researcher's responsibility to bring order and organization to the collected data (Jean Morton-Williams in Walker 1985:40).
6. The processing and analysis of data in qualitative research is primarily focused with discovering and describing a wide range of viewpoints rather than indicating whether participants feel strongly or how many hold a specific position.
7. The explanation of beliefs, attitudes, and motivations should be substantiated by evidence such as verbatim quotes from interviews or discussions. This is a critical component of qualitative analysis and reporting (Jean Morton-Williams 1985: 41).

8. The compilation of quotations is necessary to correct any misleading perceptions that may arise while reading transcripts (Jean Morton-Williams 1985: 41).
9. Much of the analysis process consists of reading and re-reading the manuscripts, noting topic numbers from the guide on the text, and maybe highlighting significant passages. Reading and re-reading the data forces the researcher to become intimately familiar with it (Jean Morton-Williams, Walker 1985:40; Marshall & Rossman 1999:152).
10. In-depth interview data are often evaluated separately, but within the context of concepts and categories generated during the processing and analysis of previous interviews (Walker in Walker 1985:5).
11. The process of category formation entails identifying trends in the environment and expressed by participants (Marshall & Rossman 1999:154).
12. The analysis of qualitative material is more openly interpretive, creative, and personal than that of quantitative material. This does not excuse qualitative research from being similarly systematic and cautious (Walker in Walker 1985:3).
13. Typical analytical procedure falls into the following six phases:
 - 13.1. Ongoing data
 - 13.2. Generating categories, themes and patterns
 - 13.3. Coding data
 - 13.4. Testing the emergent understanding
 - 13.5. Searching for alternative explanations
 - 13.6. Writing the Report(Marshall & Rossman 1999:152).

ANNEXTURE I - (CHAPTER 4)

Theme 1: Understanding of premarital counselling by participants or the lack thereof

Participant What is your understanding of premarital counselling? And your views on it?

1 and 2 Par 1: According to me, it is a contract; before you enter into a contract, you must go through the fine lines. If you agree to the terms and conditions, you attach your signature because this nowadays, people just go in without checking fine prints. Once you realise that I did not read the fine lines, there is no reverse. Once you do not agree to that, you need to negotiate to your partner. If you do not agree with your partner, there's where the problem comes because one of you will choose another direction and same to the other partner. So that's where the conflict starts.

Par 2: I got exposed to premarital counselling when the Charismatic Churches started to grow as they had premarital counselling offerings. In the mainline churches like Dutch, when I grew up, they only announced Bans for 3 weeks and if they were no objections in the 3 weeks, the wedding would proceed. I have always known to be a meaning that if my partner Mr Z want to marry somewhere again out of town or in Thabazimbi, for example, somebody will come and disagree. We were really never called and spoken about what marriage is. Premarital in Sesotho tradition, parents will do it in a way "yaa go laya". They would briefly talk about what is expected from wife and husband, but briefly not in details. So the black culture and mainline churches didn't give premarital counselling in full until Charismatics churches started. We only started hearing about courtship and counselling when they started spreading in the townships. I really was not exposed to premarital counselling. So that was the perception I had about premarital counselling.

3 and 4 Par 3: There is not much that the church did to teach us about marriage, rather preparing us for marriage. We went twice or thrice for counselling and it was not enough.

Par 4: I don't remember going for counselling

Par 3: I remember twice been with the Minister and he was the one talking about marriage. What I can say is that we did not go deeper into the counselling. Maybe timeframe the way you suggest, maybe if a person wants to get married, they must attend counselling for a year so that when the time comes, that particular person is prepared.

Par 4: I think my understanding is that, financial issues, sex, communication, how to resolve your issues, respect, loyalty, honesty, truthfulness and understanding that I am your wife, you are my husband. Come month end, we need to talk about who is going to pay this bill, who is going to do this and that. Whatever portion is left, husband or wife can spoil themselves. But the most important thing is that if we still have young kids, school fees, rent, car, house is paid, grocery is bought in the house and then everything is sorted and with the extra money, can my wife give me some certain amount as he is someone who likes to buy liquor now and then but some portion is for saving. Education, insurance, if all those things are sorted, I don't see any problem that he can buy something for himself. Then maybe once or twice in a month as a family we go out. As a family again, there is a time to pray because they say the family who prays together stays strong. Always in your marriage, they will tell you that include God. I think the other problem is that, if both partners, the one does not go to church, the one goes to church, I don't think that marriage e ba strong because in order for a marriage to work, both of you, you need to have the same vision, you need to include God. Did we include God in our marriage? I did, he did not. He did not see the value of going to church. This, remember, is not my church, it is his church. I married into this family and I adopted the church.

Par 3: Is about the roles and responsibilities that one has to take when he gets married. What is it that you need to do, what is it that you did not have to do. Know that the family comes first, make sure you are responsible for the family. Take care of the family. I think that's all in a nutshell.

Par 3: It makes one to be prepared, to avoid issues like separation and divorces. If ever you went through the process you would know that this is the limit, I can go up to this point.

Par 4: I think for me, it was going to help us to unite. Have a way of solving our issues and not shouting at each other or going to bed angry and try to understand that no,

because when we get married, they don't prepare you [so that] as now you are going to stay together he is going to leave his socks and shoes there. How do you come together and say eish my love I don't like 1, 2, 3, can you do 1, 2, 3? And then it was going to help us to understand gore if ever I am asking you to help me with the dishes it does not mean I am taking your manhood but it is about helping us to be strong as a couple.

5 and 6 Par 5: It is like a preparation, they need to prepare you so that this is what you are getting yourself into. Do you remember the marriage seminar we had in church, the other presenter spoke some of the important things and even if he made jokes that marriage is the first qualification where a person gets a certificate without undergoing the training, unlike in schooling system where you need to write exams in order to get the certificate afterwards. He said it is in marriage where a person gets a certificate and only writes exams afterwards. To me is true, because nobody really prepares you for marriage and that's the most important thing that you expect some sort of preparation, some sort of training and understanding of what am I getting myself into. If I say I want to get married, at the marriage class if there is any, they need to teach you about marriage, to prepare you, to give you guidance, real life situation, tests case like case studies

Par 6: Out of these points we also established that 8 out of 10 marriages have divorced and this is in line with current numbers of case studies. I think the world is moving to that direction and if we are going to be at the back with adopting the new styles/way which are children are being exposed in their schools now, we are going to experience lot of divorce cases in future. To your question I cannot recall our counselling very well. There is nothing I stole from the sessions. There are no lessons we learned our lesson learned and which was instilled in me that is contributing positively towards my marriage.

We were offered the so called counselling by the former Minister.

Par 5: Even for me it is vague and not clear trying to understand the features that were thought to us. If I am not mistaken it was like when we celebrate Last Supper or Baptismal, there's always a formality. I sort of remember that type of the flow. Reading from the bible that marriage is important. It was not real-life preparation. It was more like from the scripture. It was more like when we celebrate Last Supper, we start with

reading of passage just like that. It was more like that to a point that id did not make any impact. I can't remember what was spoken about but we attended the sessions.

7 Par 7: I think it will be very important now that I know to understand the fundamentals between the two of you. What is a deal breaker for each and every one of you? You must know for sure because sometimes even finances – the way you handle finances, your expectation in your marriage in terms of do you expect me to wait on you, or do we help each other because we are both working. And when you come back from work and kids are still small, you attend to them, you cook but you find the other party not assisting and doing nothing. So those are little and may look very trivial, in the long term they get to you. Being careless with money, not caring, not having projection of where you want to be, you just want to live. There were not same expectations.

These days it is very difficult to get somebody where first they believe in God. They may believe in God but not Jesus necessarily. So the Pastoral, it will get you to understand the deal breakers. It becomes a challenge in a marriage. For example praying for food, I grew up in an environment that you switch television off when we pray because we give all the respect and focus on what we are doing. For somebody, okay get on with it. Those are the small little things that in the long term you start thinking that we might not have the same belief but am I prepared. So, for me is it important, does it shape how things are viewed in the house, how kids are brought up. They mean something, they need to be cleared. You also need to understand the religious beliefs of the people, finances, how do they see money, how do they deal with money. You starting fresh, you do not have anything both of you and want to buy a dining room suite, what is expected. So is it both of you, or one will buy and the other will buy something later. Those are small little things that nobody talks about them but they cause lots of strain.

8 Par 8: W: I think it is very important because we as blacks, we are not been told the truth about what you should expect and what you are likely to experience. I remember my grandmother, when my sister was getting married, her husband was in business. So when the couple wanted to get married out of community of property contract, then my grandmother refused profoundly. She thought something was being hidden. She did not understand that the husband to be has businesses and if anything

had to happen to him they both might lose more when they marry in community of property contract. If something had to happen to the business everything will be dissolved. So, I think premarital counselling is important so that when they get into marriage, they must know about marriage, what do they bring in it. They must know what goal they must achieve what common goals. One partner might want to go study further and/or not want children while the next partner wants to start family immediately. So we need to have common goals and say this is what we need to do. In as far as finances are concerns we need to be transparent and show pay slips to see how much we bring home. Then agree on how household expenses will be shared and that's it. I think it is important and unfortunately some of us did not get it. So I think the next generation or upcoming young ones, they need to get that and understand that when they get into marriage only death will do them apart. I also don't think some of us we married with and for the same goals.

9 and 10 Par 9: You need to understand when you get into marriage what can you expect from it. So, the two must have an understanding when they get married. You must have understanding and agree who you are going to operate in marriage and how you are going to do things.

Par 10: Before you get married you need to know what are you getting yourself into, what are the challenges and disadvantages of marriage. All the things and general expectation of how thing should pen out. You prepare yourself that when I am in it. Not everything is smooth, there will be ups and downs. And if the tough gets going the other partner might want to pull out or to be strong and face the challenge, work on it, get the solution and move on. That's premarital preparation for me.

11 Par 11: From my experience it is very important because the counsellor is the person that has experience with this institution. So, she/he will be able to expose you and make you appreciated things that you might not have thought about them. And prepare you well. I would say I wish there was a special class of preparing couples to be for the marriage and before they get married. We got married and went in the journey with blind eyes. We actually did not know what marriage was all about. So premarital counselling is vital. Unfortunately, when one goes to the Charismatic Churches premarital counselling is offered but in our mainline churches is not been offered.

4.5.2 Theme 2: The role the Church played in premarital counselling and its Effectiveness

During the interview, Participants 1 and 2 told the researcher:

Par 1: “Pre-counselling must be there, some of the contents that must be discussed people with experience must also be involved in guiding a couple that intends to marry. The issue of finances, for example, plays a major role in marriage. People must be thought to live within their means, people get into that trying to impress people.”

Par 2: “To be prepared in marriage is not something that was open and displayed in the church. Bans period supposed to be an era, when you were supposed to be counselled. So we were never counselled. During that time couple to marry is expected to attend the church. The announcement will be made. The couple will be called to come up front when their wedding announcement is made but there would be no word said in the Church. I have not heard anyone saying there is a programme for couples in our church. I would be angry if there was anything and we were deprived of it.”

Participants 3 and 4 stated that as they were preparing for their marriage journey:

Par 4: “I don’t remember going for counselling”.

Par 3: “I remember twice we have been with Minister and he was the one talking about marriage. What I can say is that we did not go deeper into the counselling. Maybe timeframe and the way you suggest, maybe if a person wants to get married, must go for counselling for a year so that when the time comes, that particular person is prepared.”

Participant 4 furthermore stated that:

“I don’t think the church during those times was preparing people for marriage. I think if they did, we would not have so a lot of divorces and we would not have lot of conflicts. So, the church during those days, it was just like you are coming together and you want to get married and then the question will be do you love each other, do you love him, that’s it but they don’t go deep. Do you know what is happening in the marriage, do you know the challenges of the marriages? Have you asked yourself why did you want to get married, why? That question is important. Why do I want to get married? Is it you want to please your family, your friends, or you want the status of I am married.

Not knowing the inside of the marriage. The church during those days, they did not prepare us for the insight. So, I feel like now it is going to be a great thing that kids that are going to get married they will be taught the nitty-gritty of a marriage. It is not 'pap en vleis' [meat and gravy]. You just see a marriage is not simple and say, oh, they are getting married. Lately we are having so many couples married for three months, all of a sudden they are divorced, why? Is because they did not prepare them for premarital counselling, pre-divorce. All those things. Will you stand it. If someone says I want us to get married but prenuptial marriage, I want us to be in there. The lady will say it means you don't love me. Why would you want us to be in a prenuptial marriage? So there are a lot of things that people who are getting married now need to understand. You need to understand that if someone comes to you with prenuptial marriage it does not mean that he does not love you. It is because he feels like I don't want us when we get divorce we fight about unnecessary things. You know that you came with this and that and when you leave, you leave with what you came with and what we have acquired in the marriage we are going to share."

Participant 3, in the same sentiments, indicated that:

"... basically the church did not go deep. I think they should tell you that in a marriage this is what is expected. Know that 123 is going to happen and this is how we are going to treat it. If this is a challenge, this is how you are going to approach it."

Participant 7 expressed that:

"The church took care of the paper work. I remember that we went, had an appointment with Moruti. He had prepared the documents that he must then get us to sign. He would take them to Home Affairs and officialise our marriage. The church can play a very critical role yona e ya premarital. If we do not take ourselves to a private psychologist, that's when the church can intervene. At that time, you are not foreseeing any problems, you are not looking at realities. So, the church can bring you down to realities gore things are just not going to be 'pap en vleis' [meat and gravy]. Like have you thought about how are you going to raise the kids. Have you thought about how are you going to share responsibilities in the house, financially and physically, what are your roles, do I expect you to continue as a single man partying now that you are a husband. Same with me. So, the role of the church will be critical in bringing people into those realities in many aspects of life in general. How do we want both our families

to come in and guide us? To what extent do we bring them in. We are Africans, you marry somebody you marry the whole family.”

Participant 11 put it in this way:

“Nothing whatsoever. Our marriage was solemnised by the local reverend. So, my witnesses were two elders from the church. All the elders said is they will be witness and sign provided we promise that we won’t divorce. I think the Church does not care in my opinion. Leadership does not care about congregation well-being. We never had that since such our Congregation (URCSA).”

From the above responses of the participants it becomes very clear that participants did not get premarital counselling.

Theme 3 and sub-themes: Challenges experienced due to a lack of premarital counselling or not going through it

Conflict management

Participant 1 stated:

“My wife explained that sometimes you need to weigh the problem, and both cannot be at 100% all the time. So we must always reach a compromise.”

Supporting him, Participant 2 said the following:

“We had our hurtful patches and again I had a very good support system from my parents. My mother is a very strong person and if I went to her and said that’s it. There was a time where I wanted nothing to do with my husband at all when we were still living in Khutsong to the extent that I nearly packed up and went back home. I did not want anything to do with him. But fortunately my Mom intervened.”

Participant 7 mentioned that:

“There was definitely, I think pride will get to you because you will get to a point where you start counting gore the last time we argued about certain things, I was the one who swallowed my pride and break the ice and say can we talk. You get to a point, if I don’t initiate can we talk, the other partner is sort yourself out. That was my turning point in my marriage and said this time, I am not going to be the one who says can we

talk. I am going to let it play and see how far it is going to take us. A week became a month. My strategy was always to approach things, and I am still like that in every relationship. I believe in talking things out because I am delusional to think that. I understand that there will be a point where there will be different opinions and you are steadfast in that belief but talking is the best solution. It is through communications that we can find common grounds and compromises or agree to disagree and decide how to take things forward.”

Family and extended family/relatives

Every marriage brings two families together. One of the tests that a marriage needs to pass is the interference of families and extended relatives. According to Khunou and Malete (2021:134), families can be a huge headache in a marriage, especially in the first five years. Furthermore, they advise that every partner in a premarital relationship has to contest this space with the lover’s parents. The onus is upon the couple to manage it.

Participant 4 expressed that:

“Our family members see us a people that have money only because we plan wisely, me and my husband. So challenges would be to ask money from us, left, right and centre. I think the one thing I will never do is to refuse them money. Whatever little thing we have we share. In a nutshell di family members are our biggest challenge. 90% is family members and I think if people can be made aware of the in-laws, just to be aware of what they will go through, not that they hate us but to better prepare us.”

Participant 3 stated:

“You, one thing in the Bible that is used more often but in reality, it is not an easy thing. The Bible says a man would therefore leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh. That makes sense but it does not need to be explained and it’s straightforward. But it is not an easy thing especially in the black culture. You cannot detach. Not to say detach. I think most of us, especially in the black community where before you start your life, you start assisting back at home where your parents, where they could not make it.”

Developing a vision and mission for the family

In relation to developing the vision for marriage and family, Participant 4 said:

“I don’t think so, as I am saying going back, if we were taught some things and maybe if he had a father figure in his life, because most of the marriages are going to fail especially if those kids were not raised by their fathers because there are things that your father needs to teach you. There are so many mistakes that I am seeing that if he had a father he would know that 1, 2, 3 I must not do. A father figure plays an important role in a man’s life.”

Finances Matters

Participant 11 said:

“More than anything many marriages break up because of the finances. People are not financially intelligent in marriages hence many breakdowns. I also believe that a healthy marriage is a wonderful thing because in a healthy marriage you grow up.”

This was also confirmed by Participant 2, who said:

“Maybe when you talk to divorced couple, before there is third party and affairs in the relationship, money is mainly the source of all evils. In marriage it is the great monster. Abundance and a lack of money in couples causes fighting between couples that are not on a firm grounding. We do not talk about financial management in marriages and it is a subject that is ignored. I know for a fact because my sister, her source of the divorce, money was the problem. During premarital counselling issues of finances must get proper attention as in reality the number one factor of divorce is caused by money matters.”

Intimacy issues and family planning

In a relationship of the wife and husband, intimacy plays a very huge role in gluing the couple together. Although sex is not everything in marriage, it does play an important role in God’s economy of a healthy relationship (Khathide 2000:78). It is through the act of intimacy that couples in marriage get to know and understand each other better. The couples must also be schooled about issues of intimacy and family planning.

During the interview, Participant 2 stated:

“I think the church should prepare the girl child or woman in all areas of marriage. We are makers and breakers of the marriages. Not being sexist or anything, but we are powerful and then if this gender is not groomed, there is a chance of breeding angry men. We breed drunkards and always when there is a problem in the marriage, particularly with sexual issues, mistakes will always be visible to the community because this is how men vent by overindulging in alcohol, not coming home and not supporting the family financially. So the church should play a role in teaching about intimacy issues.”

Theme 4: Communication Management

Theme 5: The importance of the premarital counselling if it could be considered and recommendation

Participant 2 put it this way:

“I think it is a good idea. Just like in the Charismatics Churches members are afforded five minutes to tell their testimonies every Sunday. Each person is given a chance to tell a story how good God is and what the Lord has done for them. So this could be included in the formalities of the Church. This could be in a form of motivational clip, a couple talking, a guest coming to give a talk. There must be a social calendar, health calendar Bible studies. So I think honouring this calendar and events that should happen in a year, somehow it brings a very different perspective. So a church can have its own calendar and any one can leave their own legacy so that there is continuity. Announcements of the Church must be interesting and lively ‘di be le vavavum’. Something like marriage seminar, session with Dr Tabane, etc. The other thing again is the annual camp, talking about marriage because sometimes sending a message through play, demonstration becomes effective. Seeing is believing. I think this is a very good start, you organised marriage enrichment for couples because you believe for the church to be strong, it has to start from families.”

Participant 3 mentioned that:

“As much as I have said that we were not well prepared and then we were not advised properly here this is what you must expect in your marriage and this is how you should treat it, but I should think here as I was saying more time should be put into those programmes, let it be that lengthy period. Like for example I am in Grade 12 and you

will spend the whole year and will be writing at the end of the year. It should not be a thing that will be run quickly.”

Participant 4 said:

“I think it is needed more than the word needed before the couples can get married and if possible they want to get married quickly, they must be told put this on hold before you understand what marriage all about is. Stop pleasing friends and relatives or you just wanting that status is not going to help. I think what kills us is status of being called Mrs someone. So premarital counselling is going to help a lot.”

Participant 6 expressed it this way:

“The reason I say we don’t teach about marriage, a lot of us think that marriage is the celebration. For most of us marriage is the wedding day. Everything builds up to the wedding day and you have to do all of these things leading to that day. When the day comes, we are happy and have achieved. But the following week when marriage starts it is not something that you signed for. No one prepared you, no one took time to make you understand what this is what marriage is all about. Our knowledge of marriage is based on the marriages we see. So what we know is that marriages are falling and not working, so even when your marriage is on the rocks, it is okay because you have seen other marriages fail and it is expected. We do not get to be taught about marriage as young adults in the Church.”

Participant 7 said:

“So I would think maybe in the Catechism class in the church, this is where we teach our kids to preserve themselves. There’s never that. We grew up in the Church and with our parents but still we made a mistake of having a child out of wedlock. I believe there is no opportunity of talking openly about these things. My Mom was a nurse, you would think she was enlightened and I am not putting any blame on her. In our schools they did not talk to us about these things at that time, maybe the new generation of now is different. It is more than that that is required.”

Participant 10 put it this way:

“There was marriage seminar and presenters shared beautiful stories, so sustaining the momentum is what we should be going through continuously or on a quarterly

basis. Talk about topics like conflict management, communication, finances, family planning to those who are young or getting married. Do they have the same expectations or vision, values, goals, etc. I recommend that we should have other sessions like that for couples. So for example if me and my wife had counselling from the church, they would have enlightened us what is happening in a marriage and while in a marriage. We experienced some challenges and are, were not sure how to handle them. Then we know that in our church that is where we will run to, then we know that we will go there and address those challenges.”

Participant 11 stated:

“I think our mainline churches should do premarital counselling if they want to be relevant. Many things need to change. The role of the Church should go back and play the role of the Missionary Schools. The schools now are not doing anything in terms of religion. Children are lost; those children need intervention and the only body that can do that is the Church. I am impressed with what you are planning to do with Sunday school but I feel that it should be extended. Those things of youth club must come back. Go back to the original and take our kids off the streets. A child with a religious background has a good foundation. The Church needs to shift, focus and serve. What I envisage is that Religious Leaders must have engagements and some agreements with department of education.”

ANNEXURE J: BELHAR CONFSSION (1986)

<p>1. We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who through Word and Spirit gathers, protects and cares for the church from the beginning of the world and will do to the end.</p>	
<p>2. We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.</p>	
<p>We believe</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another; 	<p>Eph 2:11-22</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought, one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain; 	<p>Eph 4:1-16</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe; that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted; 	<p>Joh 17:20, 23</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptised with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together 	<p>Phil 2:1-5 1 Cor 12:4-31 Joh 13:1-17 1 Cor 1:10-13 Eph 4:1-6 Eph 3:14-20</p>

<p>come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ; that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against everything that may threaten or hinder this unity;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that this unity can take form only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the diversity of languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God; 	<p>1 Cor 10:16-17 1 Cor 11:17-34 Gal 6:2 2 Cor 1:3-4</p> <p>Rom 12:3-8 1 Cor 12:1-11 Eph 4:7-13 Gal 3:27-28 Jam 2:1-13</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church; <p><i>Therefore, we reject any doctrine</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>which absolutises either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutisation hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;</i> • <i>which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace whilst believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;</i> • <i>which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;</i> 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the Church.</i> <p>3. We believe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; • that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells; • that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity; • that God's life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world; • that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity; • that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine. <p><i>Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced</i></p>	<p>2 Cor 5:17-21</p> <p>Mt 6:13-16 Mt 5:9 2 Pet 3:13 Rev 21-22</p> <p>Eph 4:17; 6:23 Rom 6 Col 1:9-14 Col 2:13-19 Col 3:1, 4-6</p>
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<p><i>separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.</i></p>	
<p>4. We believe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● that God has revealed Godself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that in a world full of injustice and enmity God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that God calls the church to follow in this; that God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that God frees the prisoners and restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the strangers, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that God wishes to teach the people of God to do what is good and to seek the right; ● that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream; ● that the church, belonging to God, should stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others. 	<p>Dt 32:4, Lk 2:14 Jn 14:27 Eph 2:14 Isa 1:16-17 Jas 1:27; 5:1-6 Lk 1:46-55 Lk 6:20-26 Lk 7:22 Lk 16:19-31 Ps 146 Lk 4:16-19 Rom 6:13-18 Am 5</p>

<p><i>Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.</i></p> <p>5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only Head, the Church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.</p> <p>Jesus is Lord.</p> <p>To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever.</p>	<p>Eph 4:15-16</p> <p>Acts 5:29-33</p> <p>1 Pet 2:18-25</p> <p>1 Pet 3:15-18</p>
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