

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Leadership

Adventist University of Africa

School of Postgraduate Studies

Title: MARITAL CHALLENGES IN THE SAINTS ADVENTIST CHURCH IN SEYCHELLES

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God instituted the marriage institution immediately at the end of the creation week (Gen 2:24). This institution was set as a model that human beings should follow in order to fulfill God's requirements for generations to come. God's purpose in marriage is that a woman and a man united together in covenant relationship will live together as long as they both shall live provided they follow the guidelines given to them by their maker.

The marriage vows would bind them together in sacred bond that no man should separate. However, in the Saints Adventist Church in Seychelles, many couples are continuously contemplating divorce, young girls are having children before getting married and church members are getting married with non-SDAs.

The Saints Church in Seychelles have experienced significant challenges in terms of marital relationships whereby many active members at some time were lead into practices which have not brought glory and honor to God. God's Church

worldwide including the Saints Adventist Church in the Seychelles Mission in the Indian Ocean has a high moral responsibility in defending the biblical principles in family life with the advantage of having principles from the Bible and inspired commentary from the writings of Ellen G. White.

The context of this small state country with a population of not more than 100,000 favors strong external influences within the community. Many members now, especially the young ones who accepted the faith and come into the new community of believers were faced with the pressure of past unbiblical cultural relationship practices. Hence the urge of proper education to young adults and adolescents seemed crucial and timely.

This project examined the situation of the Saints SDA Church so as to find lifelong solutions towards the existing unfavorable trend.

The researcher asked the church clerk at the Saint's SDA Church to distribute 100 questionnaires to 100 members. Among the members who received the questionnaires care was taken to make sure that all the members were baptized members from the Saint's SDA church only. There were young people, middle age and elderly, married spouses, singles, divorcees, widows and widowers, spouses with or without children, and young people contemplating marriage. Gender sensitivity was also taken care of during the selection process.

Only 55 copies of the questionnaire distributed came back from the members. This represented 55% of the total distributed. Furthermore, among the 55 collected only 37 (67.3%) were filled as they should.

Besides filling of the questionnaires there were 25 spouses who were selected for interview. The following were considered in the selection: young men and women contemplating marriage, recently married spouses with and without children; spouses

remarried after divorce, and divorced spouses with children. The interview was carried out following appointments with the selected spouses in the list after sending a letter of appointment.

Results showed that failures in marital issues in families in Seychelles were due to weak foundations in the family relationships and thus required immediate remedial approaches to change the direction of the trend.

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IN SEYCHELLES

A project
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
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by
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June 2015

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To my wife Veronique and our daughters: Jemima,
Milcah, Peninnah and Mikelah.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Saints Adventist Church in the Seychelles Mission in the Indian Ocean has a high moral responsibility in defending the biblical principles in family life with the advantage of having principles from the Bible and inspired commentary from the writings of Ellen G. White. The context of this small state country with a population of not more than 85,000 favors strong external influences within the community. Many members now, especially the young ones who accepted the faith and come into the new community of believers were faced with the pressure of past unbiblical cultural relationship practices. Hence the urge of proper education to young adults and adolescents seemed crucial and timely.

Significance of the Study

The project would permit the researcher to understand the basic principles well outlined in God's word in order to better instruct couples contemplating marriage and providing support to already married couples. The research results would also be used as resource for ongoing marriage and family life education for the whole conference.

Statement of Assumptions

In this research project it was assumed that:

1. The respondents would fill the questionnaires completely and return them within reasonable time.

2. The selected church members would have the required level of understanding to fill the questionnaire successfully.
3. The answers given to all the questions were personal and not group work or influenced by someone else.
4. The answers were genuine and sincere without the fear of hiding any truth.
5. The spouses chosen for interview would be available and collaborative.
6. The data collected would be representative of all the group ages in the Saints Adventist Church.

Limitations

Some difficulties were anticipated while carrying the research work. The researcher found out that the library resources in the Seychelles National Library, which was the main library in the country, were limited with appropriate articles on the subject. The researcher also discovered that human resources in that area were also scarce and difficult to meet in the country. The researcher made appropriate use of resources available at the AUA centre at Solusi University during the yearly sessions as well as consulting online resources.

Delimitations

The researcher restricted the research activities only to members having their membership in the Saints Adventist Church.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE

The Psalmist in Psalm 127 points out that “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.” (NIV). The foundation of an edifice needs to be solid if it is to stand strong amidst the challenges of life. The covenant between the husband and wife permits a marriage relationship to last long no matter what circumstances are present. If God calls a woman and wife to be united together into an unconditional bond then he will provide the means for the relationship to sustain. The two parties covenant to stay together “for better and for worse.” Therefore God is able to rescue the couple when human agencies threaten to put them apart even before death comes.

The twenty-third fundamental belief of the Adventist Church as written in the Church Manual gives us the content of the importance of marriage.

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as the spouse and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words, they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them

to become members of His body, the family of God. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message.¹

The author of Genesis penned: “*And God saw that it was good*” (Cf. Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25).² However, at the end of the chapter He declared His work to be “*very good*” (Gen 1:31) only after He had made man and woman in His own perfect image. God’s perfect creation was pronounced only after the first human couple was created. That was a wonderful ideal and moral standard that our first parents began their relationship with!

Marital Challenges in the Old Testament

The Foundational Biblical Passage on Marriage in the Pentateuch

When God created this world in the beginning, he repeatedly recognizes that His creation was good (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). However, there was only thing that God acknowledges to be “not good”: the incomplete creation of man as a single being. We read from the text: “Then God said: ‘It is *not good* that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Gen 2:18). For procreation to happen there needs to be a male and a female. That was God’s original plan.

In the Garden of Eden God performed the first wedding ceremony giving the very first couple the mandate to be fruitful and to multiply (Gen 1:28). Both spouses were created in the perfect image of their Creator. He pronounced the wedding vows before the newlywed so that those who would come later will follow the similar principles in order to experience lasting happiness. The NIV translates the verb “*to*

¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 295.

² Unless specified, all Bible texts are from the NKJV.

join” with “*united*” which gives the implication of becoming one, a perfect whole. As Christians we are aware of the fact that this is the basis of family relationship. The moment there is a shortcut from this ideal there will always be troublesome times. We can observe that immediately in the chapter that follows the Eden blessings in chapter 3 where the enemy introduced himself as if he had a better plan for the family and humankind in general. In this chapter we can observe literal transgression of the marriage vows of being “*united*” when the woman refused to consult with her life partner before taking a major decision of life.

When God pronounced the blessings to the first couple He intended that they experience blessings not only in the act of procreation but all throughout their entire lifetime. Following the creation of the very first couple in the Garden of Eden, their Creator gave them a very special blessing before the procreation process started: “Then God blessed them, and said to them, be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). This should always be the only moral order where giving birth is concerned. Further in the same book God gave the couple the threefold aspects of the love commitment: One shall “*leave* his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* unto his wife; and they shall be *one flesh*” (Gen 2:24, Emphasis mine).

The Creator’s Marriage Covenant in Genesis 2:24

God being the originator of marriage, he is the only one able to give guidelines of sound principles in order for the relationship to be successful. The Bible describes the nature of marriage as consisting of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24). This text reveals the Biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship between a man and a woman. This covenant of companionship is

expressed more explicitly later in Scripture in such passages as Malachi 2:14 which says that: "The Lord was witness to the *covenant* between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your *companion* and your wife by *covenant*." Proverbs 2:17 expresses the same idea. Being a sacred covenant, human marriage serves in both the Old and New Testaments as the prism through which God reveals his covenant relationship with his people and Christ with his church.

In the Bible the very first description of the nature of marriage, consists of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24). The text reveals the biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship. This meaning of marriage as a covenant is expressed more explicitly further in the Holy Scriptures in passages as Malachi 2:14: "The Lord was witness to the *covenant* between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your *companion* and your wife by *covenant*." Being a sacred covenant, human marriage serves in the Old and New Testaments as the mirror through which God reveals His covenant relationship with His people and Christ with His church.

In order to fully appreciate the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant, it is helpful to distinguish between a contract and a covenant. Paul E. Palmer explains the difference between the two terms: "Contracts engage the services of people; covenants engage persons. Contracts are made for a stipulated period of time; covenants are forever. Contracts can be broken, with material loss to the contracting parties; covenants cannot be broken, but if violated, they result in personal loss and broken hearts. . . . Contracts are witnessed by people with the state as guarantor; covenants are witnessed by God with God as guarantor." ³

³ Paul F. Palmer, "Christian Marriage: Contract or Covenant?" *Theological Studies* 33 (1972): 639.

In light of this understanding of a covenant as a permanent commitment, witnessed before God, we will now examine the three components of the marriage covenant mentioned in Genesis 2:24 namely: *leaving*, *cleaving*, and *becoming one flesh*.

Leaving. The very first element in God's formula for marriage is *leaving*. This implies a detachment from one's family to form his or her own with the spouse. This is a vital step in the marriage relationship. This means that through wise counsels of parents and God fearing people the two individuals decide to start a new family. A marital relationship suggests that the new couple will not continue to depend on the parents for their basic needs but the two will start a new relationship together.

The two individuals have reached enough maturity in order to live outside the parental home. Hence a gesture of maturity is experienced in order to make a new beginning. The foundation of marriage is thus established on this sound principle: a man leaving the house of mother and father commencing a new family unity of love with his wife. Otherwise, there will be continuous turmoil within the relationship no matter how long the relationship endures.

A young man who visits a young woman occasionally without leaving his parents in the proper sense will just follow the statistics of being among the miserable. It involves serious decision making for a man to leave the house of his parents to be united in matrimony with someone with whom he will share his future life with.

Cleaving. The second step in God's covenant bonding would be the *cleaving*. This is an attachment of a man to his wife in a lifelong covenant as God has ordained for a man and a woman. According to the Creator's plan there must always be a leaving before a cleaving can take place. A man must leave all lesser relationships in order to effectively cleave to his wife in forming a new family nucleus.

The root meaning of the verb “*to cleave*” means “*to stick to,*” “*to fasten,*” “*to join,*” and “*to hold onto.*” The term reflects the central concept of the marriage covenant. It is an action towards fidelity. The Hebrew word for “cleave” is *dabaq*. It suggests the idea of being permanently glued or joined together. Also as a noun it can be used for brazing and soldering: “So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith; He who smoothes with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil, saying, “It is ready for the soldering”; then he fastened it with pegs, that it might not totter” (Isa 41:7). The result of this closeness and resulting strength of this lifetime pair bonding explains the real nature of marriage which God intended.

Cleaving in a marital relationship involves unswerving loyalty to one’s life’s partner. It is to be noted that man is to cleave to “his wife.” Not to “his wives” and worse “to his man”. The main reason is that all marital unfaithfulness and immorality are to be excluded. It has never been and will never be God’s plan for a man to be cleaved to his wife and flirt or engage in sexual intimacy with another woman or man. The two belongs only to each other.

In a marriage covenant, cleaving does not allow the parties with the “freedom to leave” when the relationship is no longer satisfying. If the “freedom to leave” is an option to be considered, it will hinder the total effort to develop a marital relationship characterized by covenant faithfulness. Marriage counselor Ed Wheat makes the following observation: “Keeping divorce as an escape clause indicates a flaw in your commitment to each other, even as tiny cracks that can be fatally widened by the many forces working to destroy homes and families.”⁴

⁴ Ed Wheat, *Love for Every Married Couple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 38.

When we agreed to cleave to someone in marriage we must be sure that we are prepared to make a lifetime commitment which is summarized in the terms: “for better or for worse till death do us part.” Once married, cleaving means that every thought, action, word, decision, or attitude should draw us closer to each other in the bonding process.

The word *cleave* is also used in other parts of the Bible with the meaning of sticking or being strongly together: “But ye that did *cleave* unto the LORD your God [are] alive every one of you this day” (Deut 4:4). This explains the connection between God and His people as a strong positive relationship. Further in chapter 11 of Deuteronomy we see a similar use of the meaning of cleaving: “For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves” (Deut 11:22, 23).

The process of leaving and cleaving in the marriage covenant is in itself a mystery. Two different entities make it a real challenge in becoming one. The two who were separated now have the privilege of living together, walking together, standing together, planning together and sharing a profound intimacy that cannot be expressed in other relationships.

I usually illustrate this mystery in my marriage counseling sessions that $1 + 1 = 1$, but when you reverse the equation $1 \div 2 = \frac{1}{2}$. The result is always fractions together with numerous bitter consequences. The latter equation explains the tremendous challenges for the two individuals to experience the reality of divorce. It’s even worse when children are involved in the relationship.

One flesh. The Creator of marriage even included another powerful step in the marriage covenant in order to put emphasis on the matter: *becoming one flesh*.

The phrase "one flesh" is frequently misunderstood to refer primarily to the sexual union between the husband and his wife. To become "one flesh" (Gen 2:24) means *to become one functioning unit*. H. C. Leupold explains that becoming one flesh "involves the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits, a union consummated in intercourse."⁵

There is no individual who has ever yet explained how two different people are able to so interpenetrate one another's lives that they become "one flesh," that is, one functioning unit. However, we know that it happens in a married relationship. This is true especially when couples who have been married for many years start to think, act, and feel as one entity; they become one in mind, heart and spirit. This is one main reason why divorce is so devastating for a couple going through this experience. It leaves two fractions of one.

"One flesh" also refers to the physical or sexual aspect of marriage. Paul explicitly uses the phrase in this way when speaking of sexual intimacy between a man and a harlot (1 Cor 6:16). Sexual intercourse in itself, does not automatically assure that a man and a woman become *one* physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Genital intercourse without the spiritual communion with God and each other often leaves people divided, alienated, and bitter toward each other. Thus, sexual intercourse in itself does not bring about real and lasting oneness.

In order to achieve the Biblical "one flesh" union as God intended sexual intercourse in marriage must be the result of genuine love, the crowning act of the

⁵ Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: DeWard, 1942), 2:137.

marital union originated from God. Hence, if sex is not the expression of genuine love, respect, and total commitment, the union will offer only a physical contact of infatuation while keeping the partners mentally and spiritually void. Sexual desire must become the desire for the total union and oneness of body, mind, and spirit between legally married couples.

The second chapter of Genesis therefore recommends the right formula to start an intimate life between a man and a woman: man had to leave the parents at a mature age and to be bonded with his life companion never to be separated. That was God's plan for success in marital relationship: the two are no longer two but one flesh. This implies that what God has *joined* together, no one should ever try to destroy or alter (Cf. Matt 19:6).

To make sure that its members understand this theology of bonding the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists found it useful to take an executive vote for an official statement concerning the sacredness of the marriage relationship: "The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is affirmed as the divinely ordained foundation of the family and social life and the only morally appropriate sharing of genital or related intimate sexual expression."⁶ This suggests that sexually intimacy is a moral issue that needs to be applied by all those who desire to cohabit together as God has ordained from the beginning.

Therefore, if we want to safeguard the high Christian standard of man and woman relationship we have to go back to the biblical concept that our wise Creator decided to establish even before the creation of human beings.

⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Communication Department, *Statements Guidelines & Other Documents*, 4th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2010), 74.

Marriage and Human Transgression

The Scripture holds both Adam and Eve as being accountable for the entrance of sin into the world (Gen 3:6; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21, 22). Both partners denied responsibility for their behavior by blaming others. Therefore their failure to follow God's plan led to separation from Him and from each another (Gen 3:8-13). Adam's and Eve's sin resulted in the loss of intimacy, mutuality, harmony and togetherness. Instead their relationship was marked by guilt, fear, shame, and blame (Gen 3:7-12). The fall destroyed the delicate balance in their marriage covenant. Under the curse of sin, the woman would now struggle with an inordinate desire for connectedness, even as the man would assume supremacy over her (Gen 3:16). The curse on the ground and the pain that would now be experienced in childbirth set the stage for strife over work, sexual desire, and procreation (Gen 3:14-19). In many cultures women came to be considered as human property, slaves, and differences in power. The sad effects of sin on marriage are often manifested in misunderstanding, neglect, conflict, alienation, and failure to love, accept and forgive one another. Violence and abusive behavior in human relationships are among the most destructive manifestations of the effect of sin on marriage and family life (Gen 4:8, 19, 23, 24; 6:11, 13; 2 Sam 13:11-20; Ps 11:5; Isa 58:4, 5; Rom 13:10; Gal 5:19-21).

God intended that the marriage covenant to be celebrated on solid principles of love, loyalty, exclusiveness, trust, and support experienced the couple in obedience to God (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:6; 1 Cor 13; Eph 5:21-29; 1 Thess 4:1-7). When the above principles are violated, Scripture acknowledges that the marriage covenant is undermined and may be destroyed (Deut 24:1-4; Prov 5:1-23; 6:20-35; Mal 2:14; cf. Hos 2:2-13). Apart from the death of a partner, other factors that can lead to the destruction of a marriage covenant are sexual immorality and desertion by an

unbelieving partner (Deut 24:1-5; Matt 5:32, 19:9; Rom 7:2, 3; 1 Cor 7:15). The marriage covenant can also be threatened and destroyed through abuse and violence in the family (Mal 2:14-16; cf. 1 Tim 5:8).

Marital Protection in the Ten Commandments

From the day of open transgression it was evident of the curse that sin has brought to the first couple in Eden. Therefore, God found it necessary to include in the Decalogue sound principles to protect man's interrelationship from continuous degradation. For instance the seventh commandment demands that we do "not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14). This was meant to protect us from immoral intimacy with the wife of our neighbor. This commandment is for the benefit of every human being to live in ethical protection from immoral pitfalls.

Marriage is therefore considered as being ordained by God Himself in the Garden of Eden to the first couple. His plan was that the fundamental principles within the marriage vow should be celebrated as long as the family unity exists. No other methods should be imported within such sacred union which He has ordained Himself because the outcome will be bitter and disappointing. There should be absolutely no personal and egocentric adventures to be brought within a sacred environment for God cannot tolerate evil to cohabit with what He has blessed.

God's plan has always been to save the human race from total destruction. He even made provision for our salvation even when we were still rebellious against Him (Cf. Rom 5:8). This concern for intimacy was felt immediately after man has sinned. He looked for him in the Garden of Eden. The pertinent question continues to echo in all relationship situations today: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). Sin always compels us to hide from God. This is why when somebody breaks the marriage vow or gets into immoral conducts he/she tries to flee from God's holiness and presence. What is

amazing in such transactions is that God is always willing to find out where His lost children are so that He can carry them back home. What methods, therefore, should the church follow in order to save the lost in marital issues?

When the church was established, it was felt profoundly that any member being disciplined after being involved in a grievous wrong such as “fornication, adultery and all acts of moral indiscretion, should be disciplined by the Church at a called business meeting.”⁷ Such sins should never be dealt with lightly and therefore all efforts should be made to sanction as well as restore the offender.

Marriage in the Prophets

In the book of Hosea we see an interesting situation where God uses a marital relationship in comparing the relationship the people of Israel had with Him. In the third chapter of Hosea it is recorded:

Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of [her] friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen [pieces] of silver, and [for] an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for [another] man: so [will] I also [be] for thee. For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and [without] teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days. (Hos 3:1-5)

Here we can understand the love of God towards His rebellious people in comparison to a husband accepting back his wife who has departed and committed adultery. God intended a pure relationship but in the case of unfaithfulness He is ready to forgive and restore the repentant sinner.

⁷ *Church Manual* (2000), 185.

Here we can feel that Solomon considers love as a principle whereby purity is the background of a relationship between a man and a woman. Bringing his lover to his mother's house suggests that parental respect existed so as to be guided to the right choice of behavior.

Marriage in the Book of Proverbs

In the book of Proverbs, the author warns that violating the commandments of God is a serious matter. This is strongly expressed in the sixth chapter: "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, [and] tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and [when] thou awakest, it shall talk with thee" (Prov 6:20-22).

Following the advice to keep the commandments of God continuously the author of Proverbs specifically illustrates his point in relation to the seventh commandment as follows:

For the commandment [is] a lamp; and the law [is] light; and reproofs of instruction [are] the way of life: To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman [a man is brought] to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. (Prov 6:23-29)

According to the commandment those who commit adultery would be punished. The author further concludes that "whoever commits adultery lacks understanding and destroys his or her own soul" (Prov 6:32). The principle of purity is important for the author of Proverbs because violating the seventh commandment is equivalent to destroying one's own soul. In other words, adultery is a suicidal act.

Marital Challenges in the Book of Malachi

Many of the Jews who returned from the Babylonian exile married unbelieving heathen women living in the land of Judah. During the time of Moses such marriages were strictly forbidden because such practice will lead the Israelites to the worship of heathen gods (Deut 7:1-4; Judg 3:5-6; 1 Kgs 11:1-8). Ezra (Ezra 10:2-3) and Nehemiah (Neh 13:23-24) were the ones addressing the issue during reign as governors. These unions were obliged to be dissolved (Ezra 10:10-11; Neh 13:30).

The prophet Malachi was raised up by God in such a time in order to expose the causes of the spiritual decline of the people of Israel and to lead them back into a restored fellowship with God. Malachi here exposes the sin of mixed marriages (Mal 2:10-12) as well as the sin of divorce. Malachi informs us that God sees marriage as a sacred covenant binding two persons in a permanent relationship before God as long as they both shall live (Gen 31:50; Prov 2:17). Since "the Lord was witness to the [marriage] covenant," breaking it by divorcing one's wife meant to be faithless not only to one's spouse but also to God.

Divorce, then, threatens not only the institution of marriage but also the security needed to raise a godly family. Malachi concludes his chapter 2 by expressing God's attitude toward divorce: "For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless" (Mal 2:16). It is noteworthy that God hates divorce and not the divorcee. As Christians, we should reflect Christ's compassionate attitude toward those who have experienced the trauma of divorce. In the New Testament Christ dealt graciously with the Samaritan woman who had been married five times (John 4:6-26).

Marriage Challenges in the New Testament

Jesus Christ and Marital Challenges

When Christ began His public ministry he gave His decided sanction to the institution that had been sanctioned in Eden. During the wedding in Cana, the guests realized that there was a need of more wine in order for the celebrations to continue. The presence of Christ at this wedding permitted the people present to understand that when the wine of family life is missing there is no joy at all. If Christ is welcomed to be the permanent guest of the home then He will surely provide for all necessities of the family. In so doing the Originator of family life declared to all that He will not refuse His presence on marriage occasions, and that marriage, when joined with purity and holiness, truth and righteousness, is one of the greatest blessings ever given to the human family.⁸

In the fifth chapter of the book of Matthew Jesus brings another aspect of immoral act in terms of committing adultery only by a look. He told the people who were around Him: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt 5:27, 28). For Jesus the thought is already a guilty step in transgressing the seventh commandment that He gave in the beginning. This reminds us that God does not take for granted any act of transgression outside the marriage vows.

In Matthew chapter 19 when Jesus was questioned about marriage relations He clearly instructed the Pharisees that a marriage vow should not be terminated but live to its fullness all the days of the couple. He wanted everyone to know that divorce

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God* (Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen White Estate, 2007).

was only the result of the hardness of the hearts of the spouses (Cf. Matt 19:8).

Despite marital challenges within the family circle Christ urged couples to stay within the sacred vow unless there was unfaithfulness then divorce might be considered only at the very last resort. We can clearly notice here that Jesus regarded the marriage vow as a covenant for life and never to be escaped when crisis turned out. Maybe that's the profound meaning behind these famous words which are repeated at each wedding ceremony: *for better and for worse*.

In order to put weight on the principles of marriage Jesus instructed the Pharisees concerning the binding principles of marriage in order to avoid divorce. It is recorded in the tenth chapter of Mark:

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away [his] wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put [her] away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same [matter]. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery. (Mark 10:2-12).

For Jesus it is not so easy to get a divorce whenever a conflict arises in the relationship. He is here discouraging married couples to get divorced on the ground of a conflict between them. He is also instructing the religious people that if a divorce is granted and one or both parties are guilty then the marriage that will follow will be an adulterous union. This teaching will prevent couples from getting a divorce out of any trivial reason and also protecting the married couples.

Despite the fact that Jesus clear instructions concerning the importance of marriage the religious people of His time used the principles as a means of attacking

His teachings. The episode in the twenty-second chapter of Matthew tells us the ignorance of the Sadducees.

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. (Matt 22:23-30).

The Sadducees knew the tradition of the church when a spouse lost her husband but they were using their tradition as a means to trap Jesus in His teaching. In this example the principle of marriage is used out of context to make it a pretext.

Divorce

It is very well known that divorce is no longer an experience contracted only by Hollywood movie stars. Everyone is affected by divorce. People from all walks of life, including religious people as Christians, are affected directly or indirectly.

The main reason why divorce is continuously increasing among Christians is the growing acceptance of the general societal view of marriage as being considered to be a social contract, governed by civil laws, rather than as a sacred lifelong covenant originated from God. The husband and wife no longer promise each other faithfulness "till death do us part." Sad to say, there are numerous couples today which are adopting the modern version of the marriage vow, in pledging to remain together "as long as we both shall love."

It is not known how divorce began. The Bible shows that, unlike marriage, divorce was not instituted by God. We do not find any Biblical indication suggesting that God introduced and institutionalized divorce after the Fall as part of His order for

human society. Divorce is therefore a "man-made," not divinely ordained institution. This is basically the result of human beings continuously rejecting God's original plan for the indissolubility of the marriage covenant.

When Jesus commented on the subject of divorce in the Gospels, he explained to his disciples that divorce represents a change in God's order because "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8). The Savior further observed that it was because of the "hardness" of human heart that Moses "allowed" divorce (Matt 19:8). Therefore, to allow a practice is not the same as instituting it. When divorce first appeared in the Bible, the practice was already in existence.

Through Moses, God regulated divorce in order to prevent its abuse. This does not mean that God takes divorce for granted or worse winked at it. It rather means that God acknowledged its existence and regulated it to prevent a bad situation from worsening.

The Apostle Paul and Marital Challenges

The Apostle Paul gave a clear theology about marital duties and the challenges it brings. In his first letter to the Corinthians he responded to the church members' query about the obligation of matrimony.

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: [It is] good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, [to avoid] fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except [it be] with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. (1 Cor 7:1-5)

The apostle Paul puts it clear that a man does not belong to himself and the wife as well. They belong to each other and should always respond with love towards one another. Further in the book of Hebrews the writer counsels that "Marriage [is]

honorable in all, and the bed undefiled” (Heb 13:4). He therefore compares Christ’s church as a pure bride. We should therefore understand why the principles in marriage should always be upheld no matter how difficult the time we are living now has become: Striving for purity in marital conduct.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 Paul addresses the issue of divorce in the light of Jesus’ teaching on divorce as was being practiced in the apostolic church. He begins the chapter by setting forth some general principles about marriage. The right way to avoid the temptation to sexual immorality is to abide to the reality whereby "each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Cor 7:2). Both husband and wife should fulfill their respective conjugal roles (1 Cor 7:3-5). The unmarried and the widows who have the gift of celibacy should remain single (1 Cor 7:7-8). Then Paul talks about the three different divorce situations: (1) the divorce of two believers (vv. 10-11), (2) the divorce of a believer and an unbeliever where the unbeliever does not want to divorce, and (3) the divorce of a believer and an unbeliever where the unbeliever wants to divorce.

Commenting on divorce of two believers, Paul speaks to married believers who might consider divorce as a means to resolve their marital conflicts: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife" (1 Cor 7:10-11). With reference to the teaching of Christ (cf. Mark 10:9, 11, 12; Luke 16:18; Matt 19:3-9), Paul declares in strong terms that a Christian couple should not seek divorce. Twice he affirms the no-divorce principle: ". . . the wife should not separate from her husband . . . and the husband should not divorce his wife" (1 Cor 7:10-11). The basis of Paul’s prohibition is Christ’s teaching that husband and wife are one flesh and what God has joined

together no man should separate. Therefore believers should not seek divorce because the marriage union is sacred and lifelong. To destroy such a union through divorce and planning to remarry is to commit adultery.

Writing to the Christians at Ephesus the apostle Paul instructs the members about their duties towards their spouses:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so [let] the wives [be] to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife [see] that she reverences [her] husband. (Eph 5:22-33)

The above passage illustrates a profound comparison between the relationship with a spouse and Jesus Christ with His church. The marriage relationship should be an indication of how Christ relates to His church. He loves it, He cares for it and He gave everything to make sure that it is blessed and lives to the heavenly standard. If every couple could experience relationship in such manner there would be tremendous blessings in every family.

Symbol of Marriage in the Book of Revelation

In the book of Revelation we see two women being portrayed as symbols. The first woman appears in chapter 12:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon,

having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and [to] his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred [and] threescore days. (Rev 12:1-6)

The woman here symbolizes God's church. This is a pure woman who is illustrated as God's church which is upholding the His principles. Here again we see the symbol of a pure and modest woman symbolizing God's church.

Further in the seventeenth chapter of Revelation we see another woman totally difference from the previous one.

And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead [was] a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. (Rev 17:4-7)

This time the woman symbolizes the apostate church. Her action is against the principles that God has laid for a pure woman. The language used here of "filthiness" and "fornication" gives us the characteristic of an unfaithful or adulterous woman.

We can see the difference of two women symbolizing the opposite things depending on their situations. A pure woman symbolizes God's church and His people whereas an adulterous or unfaithful woman symbolizing the apostate church and rebellious people. It suggests to us that the issue of purity is very fundamental in the sight of God even as to use a pure woman as a perfect symbol of His church.

To safeguard God's people against the pandemic the General Conference Communication Department has provided statements and guidelines for the Church

on the issue of HIV/AIDS.⁹ Unless the heavenly principles of relationship are being practiced the trend will continue and no one will be spared. Despite these challenges we have a loving God who is continuously on the search in order to rescue those who have fallen already.

The General Conference Official Statement on Marriage

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, as the highest level of our church organization realizes the pertinence of having an official statement on Marriage which every member of the church must be familiar with in order to have a united manner of celebrating life within the family circle. In March 2006 the Department of Family Ministries World Advisory approved a statement entitled: “*Biblical Perspectives on Marriage*”¹⁰ which highlighted four main points namely: (a) God’s Original Plan for Marriage, (b) Marriage and Human Transgression, (c) Marriage and the Gospel, and (d) The Role of the Church.

The statement focuses on the biblical theology of marriage having “the divine intent for the first marriage to be the pattern for all future marriage relationships.”¹¹ From the above statement it is stipulated that every single marriage should have the blessings as God has intended for all couples desiring to start a family relationship between husband and wife. The statement touches fundamental aspects of marital

⁹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Communication Department. *Statements Guidelines & Other Documents*, 4th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2010), 170-175.

¹⁰ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Family Ministries, “Divorce and Remarriage in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” Accessed 13 October 2015, <http://family.adventist.org/home---divorce-and-remarriage-in-the-seventh-day-adventist-church---marriage-divorce-and-remarriage.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

relationship that God has designed for the wellbeing of humanity. A summary of the paper will be presented in order for the reader to appreciate for biblical theology of marriage as God has designed.

The statement defines marriage as a lifelong, exclusive union between a male and a female with the three essential elements “leaving” which implies the creation of a distinct family unit publicly recognized by the couple’s families, the community of faith and the society at large. “Being joined” refers to the mutual commitment of the couple expressed in a formal marriage covenant and “becoming one flesh” describes both the sexual union and the process of growth in intimacy, unity, and fulfillment that God intends a couple to experience in all aspects of their lives.

The purpose of marriage as designed by God was to meet the human need of love, companionship and community. This complementary relationship between a man and a woman was to enhance the development of human wholeness and a fuller understanding of each other and of God and His love. The Bible presents marriage as the cornerstone relationship in the family and takes precedence over all other human relationships. When the man “leaves his father and his mother” the couple is sufficiently mature to establish and maintain a new family unit. Even if they will continue to receive support, nurture, or counsel from family members and others they should give priority in protecting the boundaries around their covenant relationship.

The most fundamental passage in Scripture on marriage is Genesis 2:23, 24 where marriage is expressed in covenantal language. In God’s plan for marriage the two partners forming the couple should be regarded as equals in making a covenant with each other before God. In the biblical sense, this covenant is a binding commitment that includes promises, privileges, and obligations. When they pronounce their vows the husband and wife seal their covenant before God and men

pledging love, loyalty, and total dedication to each other as long as they both shall live. This is a very serious covenant which should always remind the pair all the days of their lives even if they encounter challenges in life. Throughout the lifetime this entity should experience a relationship characterized by mutual steadfast love; goodwill, fidelity, and commitment to permanence.

On the other hand, sexual intimacy between a man and a woman in marriage is an exquisite and sacred gift granted to the human family by God when He created them. God intended that sexual intimacy be shared only for marriage (Cf. Exod 20:14; Prov 5:15-17; Heb 13:4). Although some people might argue that they are free to express their appreciation for each other without getting married this does not mean that one is free to choose as he or she pleases. God is not honored in such relationship. God intended sexual relationship between married couples to experience love, pleasure, celebration, and bonding, a blessing to be enjoyed without shame and received with thankfulness. The Bible portrays sexual intercourse and love-play as a wholesome, delightful expression of togetherness that promote an ever-increasing closeness, happiness, and security between husband and wife (Cf. Gen 2:23-25; Prov. 5:18-20).

Marriage and the Gospel

It has been God's plan since the beginning of the entrance of sin to actively work to restore everything that was lost in Eden. Many laws were given in order to uphold and protect the marriage covenant (Cf. Exod 20:14; Lev 18; Deut 5:18-21; 22:13-30). In illuminating the special intimate relationship between Himself and His people God uses marriage imagery. An entire book of Scripture reflects the Edenic themes of joy, delight, mutuality, safety, and oneness experienced in the marriage relationship (Song of Solomon).

The Gospel has room for singleness and marriage. The life and Jesus and Paul give evidence of such choices and the ability to be active in ministry. Either by choice or circumstance, single and married individuals are able to experience wholeness, connection with others through family and friends, and bring glory to God as single men and women (Cf. 1 Cor 7).

The Role of the Church

“As the body of Christ, the church is called to be a faith community that is inclusive of all members, both single and married. In building a sense of community, the church concerns itself with strengthening all relationships, especially the marriage relationship which is foundational to family, church and society.”¹² God has chosen leaders as instruments in upholding God’s ideal and proclaiming the divine will of marriage. Such ministry seeks to prepare children and youth in the family, church, and school for single or married adult life. In so doing the couples are capable of making wise marital choices; relational skills are strengthened, and also facilitate marital commitment and growth.

Adventist church pioneers have much to say about the challenges that marital relationship faces. Her numerous volumes on family issues are worthy to be consulted in order to understand her strong position on positive family bonds within the family circle.

Ellen G. White Counsels

Ellen White found the profound foundation of marriage relationship in these terms: “Christ honored the marriage relation by making it also a symbol of the union

¹² Ibid.

between Him and His redeemed ones. He Himself is the Bridegroom; the bride is His church, of which, as His chosen one.”¹³ In so doing she based her arguments on Biblical principles: “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee” (Song 4:7). Christ “loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it; ... that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives” Eph 5:25-28. She further states that “the family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth.”¹⁴ And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities.

We are abundantly blessed with the counsels of Ellen G. White concerning the blessings we experience in living up to the moral and eternal standards of Christian living where relationship is concerned. In *Testimony Treasures*, Ellen White reminds us of the moral pollution that the world is experiencing during the last days of Earth’s history. She explains that both unbelievers and professed church members are alike guilty of such practice.¹⁵ She further explains that professed Christians who are indulged in immorality cannot dwell on pure things because they have become corrupted.¹⁶ It is more than obvious that she feels the strong bonds leading people in the downward direction towards immoral corruption.¹⁷ That is the behavior of the

¹³ White, *Adventist Home*, 117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ White, *Testimony Treasures* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2010), 1:256.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1930), 435.

young people will lead them to watch pornographic movies which in turn will lead to engagement in premarital sexual relationship which may lead to unwanted pregnancies, abortion and contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), AIDS and premature death.

In one of her special book written to the young people Ellen G. White exposed numerous valuable counsels which will successfully lead the young from teenage up to the old age. She defines love as “a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus”¹⁸ thus a heavenly principle and not just a feeling as many individuals have failed to discover. Young people preparing for marriage should be careful about their feelings so that the development of their character will prepare them for an eternal destiny. If the young people agree to take up the challenge to read the precious counsels which have been inspired for proper use it will be observed that many positive consequences among those who are contemplating marriage will follow course.¹⁹

Seeing the pertinence of this special section of the book in the following paragraphs the researcher will unpack the principles behind marriage as is required for every young person contemplating this life-long experience as it is exposed in *Messages to Young People*.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Section XV: “Courtship and Marriage” of *Messages to Young People* by Ellen G. White contains valuable counsels for all those who wish to be blessed in the bond of matrimony. It is the desire of the researcher that every young person should read and meditate upon these inspired chapters at their teenage. The result that will follow will be just amazing and very helpful when it comes to the choice of a lifetime companion.

²⁰ White, *Messages to Young People*, 435-464.

Ellen G. White's Counsels on Specific Aspects of Marriage

Ellen White has spent a lifetime in writing numerous counsels on marriage for all ages. She wrote on all aspects of the family relationships touching every group from childhood, infancy, adolescence, adulthood and old age. She has impacted many couples and members of families at large in her numerous volumes of family life unfolding the biblical principles of faithful family life. Even today church members as well as non-members continue to use her writings for guidance, teaching and leading in various family issues. The writer will unpack a few specific counsels that she has written for the benefit of all those who aspire to live a life of horizontal relationship that will give glory and honor to God.

True Love

What is the definition of true love? In commenting on true and false principles of love the inspired writer comments that love is a *precious gift*, which we receive from Jesus.²¹ A gift is something that we receive from someone else. We cannot buy love. We cannot manufacture it in a laboratory. It is a principle that explains who God really is and what changes He can bring in one's life when His gift is being accepted. In other words its pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle given by the Creator of love.

Wrong Forms of Courtship

What are the forms of courtship that Heaven forbids if we desire to actualize real love in our behavior? There are right and wrong forms of courtship which all who are contemplating marriage should be aware of. Firmness and self-denial in one's

²¹ Ibid., 435.

character will permit couples-to-be in obtaining a genuine religious experience throughout the lifetime experiences. Hasty marriages should always be avoided. Mrs. White wisely counsels that the habit of sitting late at night is customary, but it is not pleasing to God, even if both parties are Christians. These untimely hours injure health; unfit the mind for the next day's duties, and have an appearance of evil.²² This statement is very true because God has created us with feelings that if not well managed can lead us to bitter experiences. We are not able to control our feelings as we think we should. Therefore it is wise for young lovers to avoid meeting at certain time and in certain places which will be difficult to escape when trouble shows up.

Engagement with Unbelievers

What about an Adventist believer courting a non- Adventist with the intention of getting married one day? Imagine a couple who is already engaged and the plans for the wedding is already in process? There is no better advice than to follow the judicious counsels of the inspired writer: It's better to break an engagement, made through infatuation, in fear of God, than to keep it and thereby dishonor your Maker.²³

Too often two young persons have already made their decision to get married before seeking the parents' or even the pastor's advice on the lifetime union. The parents and the church leaders cannot condone a relationship which God forbids. What about getting another minister from another denomination to bless the union in case that the Adventist minister refuses? Getting a minister of another faith to bless the union will not solve the problem but worsen the situation. I have seen a number of cases in the Adventist church in Seychelles whereby the vows did not bring any

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

happiness at all. If the word of God forbids a union between two individuals who are making a compromise in relation to their beliefs then wherever it is done and whoever does it does not change the consequences. What about the counsels and guidance offered by God-fearing parents and other adults?

Need of Counsel and Guidance

Obedience to parents is of great importance during the process of securing a life partner in matrimony. The fifth commandment requires children to “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Exod 20:12). The word of God explicitly commands that children should obey their parents *in the Lord*; for this is the right thing to do” (Cf. Eph 6:1). While they are to love and honor their parents, the young are also to respect the judgment of men of experience with whom they are connected in the church. These could be the elders, the church pastor or any adult who are God fearing and have experience in the field of relationship between husband and wife. When should be the right time for wedding ceremony to take place? Is it wise for a couple to get married quickly and then take the years ahead for growth?

Young people who enter upon the marriage relation with unripe love, immature judgment, without noble, elevated feelings, and take upon themselves the marriage vows, wholly led by their boyish, girlish passions will be heading for disaster. The result of such unions will be disgraceful separations. Marriages which are Immature contribute to a large amount of evils that we see in the world today. The physical and mental health is not promoted by a marriage that is entered on too early in life. Satan’s strategy is to secure the youth in sin and ultimately destroy their

future.²⁴ Recently I was touched with a scenario on television whereby a husband brought his wife to court because his mother was the one controlling the marriage relationship. What really annoyed me was the decision of the jury to ask the couple if they would agree to have private counseling with her which they agreed! If they had taken time to prepare for the relationship they would have avoided the embarrassment they set themselves in public. Despite all the counsels that are being given today are people taking heed of such advice? What should be the behavior of the ones contemplating marriage?

Marriage Preparation

Many people including Christians are committing the same mistakes as did the people in the days of Noah. Whenever a couple is getting prepared for marriage both partners should consider seriously issues like modesty, simplicity, sincerity, morality, and religion. I totally agree with the advice that “If men and women are in the habit of praying twice a day before they contemplate marriage, they should pray four times a day when such a step is anticipated.”²⁵ This means that prayer is part and parcel of the process of being prepared for the marriage covenant. How can one enter into a relationship designed by the Creator and not consulting Him in the process? This is the main reason why marriage relationship should never be considered as a social union but above all a spiritual commitment. What are the responsibilities that a couple should expect in such union?

Too many couples have been married without taking the time to possess the minimum assets that they can call their own. Marriage was meant to be a blessing for

²⁴ White, *Messages to Young People*, 454.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 460.

humanity and never a curse or a burden. Those professing to be Christians should not enter the marriage relation until they have carefully and prayerfully considered the union to be for the glory of God. Before having children the couple should take into consideration whether God would be glorified or dishonored by their bringing children into the world. Parents have no right to bring children into the world to be a burden to others.²⁶ What biblical examples can we follow in order to avoid bitter disappointments in the marriage covenant?

Many biblical examples have confirmed that the happiness and prosperity of the marriage relation depends upon the unity of both parties. Between the believer and the unbeliever there is a radical difference of tastes, inclinations, and purposes. However pure and correct one's principles may be the influence of an unbelieving companion will have a tendency to lead away from God. Isaac was highly honored by God because when he was forty years of age he submitted to his father's judgment in appointing his experienced servant to choose a wife for him.²⁷ How wonderful it would be for modern Christians to follow this wise behavior. When all is done, are there any threats which might make the couple consider for separation or divorce? What does Ellen White has to say about divorce whenever things seem to be challenging within the marital relationship?

Divorce

Ellen G. White counseled that "marriage is a contract for life."²⁸ She stressed on the importance of appropriate preparation before entering such covenant. Her

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 340.

comments on the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes on the fact that Jesus corrected misconception on marriage which was the custom of the day. The Creator and Savior of family bonds made it clear that nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow. Much work of reconciliation should be pursued whenever the threat of divorce comes about. Most of the time there is lack of proper application of marital principles which brings couples to venture in such direction.

We have seen that Ellen G. White regards the marriage relationship as a sacred tie which demands divine guidance from the days of preparation throughout the lifetime of the couple. There should never be rushing into such covenant but rather time should be considered for the preparations for prayer as well as saving enough to take care of the family needs. If a mistake is made in the process of courting it is better to stop the preparations and ask God for forgiveness if biblical principles such as being unequally yoked with unbelievers have been overseen.

What Other Christian Authorities Say About Marriage

In her book *Highly Effective Marriage*, Nancy Van Pelt pointed out that “Love is essential for the survival of all humans, from babyhood to adulthood but the way each sex needs love to be expressed is different.”²⁹ What is meant here is that human beings are in need of love from the very first day in this world until the last day of existence each according to the context of maturity level. Anthony Welsh takes the point further in saying that: “It is not the threat of death, illness, hardship, or poverty that crushes the human spirit; it is the fear of being alone and unloved in the

²⁹ Nancy Van Pelt, *Highly Effective Marriage* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 23.

universe.”³⁰ Profound thought is being expressed here where intimacy and the need to be loved is concerned. Carolyn Saarni puts it in another way when she wrote that: “We are the products of our relationships, which are always transactional.”³¹ In this statement she means to express her thought that humans are in search for meaningfulness from the people who have loved them, spent time with them, taught them and even exploited them. For a relationship to work effectively there needs to have strong bonds of love which keeps growing as an individual grows. There should be a sort of intimacy development between the two individuals who desire to share life together in marriage.

Ed Wheat when commenting on “intimacy” in marriage relationship (derived from the Latin *intimus*, meaning: inmost) “refers to the state of being most private, most personal relationship.”³² This depicts a special quality of emotional closeness between two persons in which both are constantly alert and responsive to change of feelings and to the wellbeing of the other. For young people to be able to experience strong intimate relationship with the opposite sex there needs to have proper mentoring duties. Who is then responsible to offer sex education and when should this mentoring start?

Karen and Ron Flowers, in *Human Sexuality* gives four levels of relationships to help parents prepare their children to face the reality of marital challenges in the time we are living in. In presenting the topic on The Covenant of Marriage, the

³⁰ Paul Pearsall, *A Healing Intimacy* (New York: Crown Trade, 1994), 7.

³¹ Carolyn Saarni, *The Development of Emotional Competence*, 1st ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 9.

³² Ed Wheat and Gloria Okes Perkins, *Love Life for Every Married Couple: How to Fall in Love, Stay in Love, Rekindle Your Love* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980).

Flowers couple presents four levels of relationships which parents should be aware so as to help their children: middle childhood, preadolescence, early adolescence and adolescence.³³ These levels of relationships permit the parents to teach their children understand the process in understanding the marriage covenant. I very much appreciate this initiative in dealing with human sexuality at the early age because when an individual reaches adolescence he/she is able to understand human sexuality and is able to make wise decisions for life.

Dr. James Dobson is America's most respected expert on family issues. He has helped so many people in finding answers to family related issues such as discipline, single parenting, sex education, how to make marriage work, how to develop the family's spiritual life.³⁴ In his book: *The Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide*, Dobson gives us an insight in a *Question and Answer* format in the chapter entitled: "Sex Education, Where, When and How?"³⁵ One of the pertinent questions that was asked was: "We're told that sex education programs reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy. Do they work?" The answer given by Dr. Dobson was as follows: "Hardly! As the safe-sex ideology has been taught in the nation's schools, the rates of unwed pregnancy and abortion among teens have skyrocketed. A comprehensive study conducted by Stan Weed and Joseph Olson at the Institute for Research and Evaluation confirms that the Planned Parenthood

³³ Karen Flowers and Ron Flowers, *Human Sexuality* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2004), 41.

³⁴ James C. Dobson, "Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide," accessed 27 June 2007, https://drjamesdobson.org/Resource?r=marriage_and_family_guide.

³⁵ Dobson, *Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2000), 149.

approach actually worsens, rather than lessens, the problem of adolescent sexuality.”³⁶

This hit me hard! More than sex education is needed to be taught to our young people if we want them to make the right decision in life where relationship is concerned.

Another pertinent question asked was: “When parents need help with sex education, who do you think should provide it?” The answer was: “Churches believing in abstinence before marriage and in lifelong marital fidelity should step in and offer their help to families sharing that commitment. There is no other agency or institution likely to represent the theology of the church better than the church itself.”³⁷ This is a powerful point well made here. If church leaders do not recognize this high responsibility then there’s no way that the biblical principles of marriage are going to be followed by those desiring to be united in bonds of love. Sex education has a profound moral base which is taught by the word of God. When the moral base is strong there will surely be many victories to be claimed and won by those who do the will of the Lord. Church leaders need to get together and work out effective plans in order to uplift God’s moral principles as He has revealed to the biblical writers to convey to us. What are the reasons that people get married and how can a couple make the marriage relationship work amidst daily challenges of life?

Bryan Craig in his book “*Searching for Intimacy in Marriage*” expresses his experiences as an experienced marriage and family therapist. His book is very helpful in helping pastors and couples discover how to make marriage work despite stresses, differences and even the high failure rate of even Christian marriages.³⁸ It is evident

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 153.

³⁸ Bryan Craig, *Searching for Intimacy in Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 18.

that an overwhelming majority of individuals still aspires to be married at some stage in their life. However, Craig thinks that what are changing are the attitudes and expectations people have about marriage. Whereas in the past, people got married for economic survival, today reasons individuals pursue marriage are more about personal fulfillment and emotional support.³⁹ He describes marriage as a journey towards intimacy.⁴⁰ The same author suggested that the three key expressions of Genesis 2:24 include (a) mutual desire and attraction, (b) mutual commitment and (c) mutual intimacy and companionship. These three expressions highlight the three key components to building a balanced view of marriage and illuminate the pathway to developing a happy, healthy marital relationship.⁴¹ What about marital infidelity in the relationship? How should this issue be viewed and dealt with?

Brad Lewis writing about Affairs and Marital Infidelity attracts our attention with the classical steps which lead to cheating on one's spouse. Most scenarios happen in almost the same way and the consequences are the same.

You're fed up with your spouse, so you start chatting with that attractive person of the opposite sex in the next cubicle. You've known him for years, and it's so easy to talk. He just listens. Pretty soon you're sharing intimate problems, and now the co-worker is telling you how hard you have it. Maybe you should just leave your spouse ... and maybe the two of you should go out to lunch to talk more about it all. With this person, you're finding what you need and want: a sympathetic ear, someone who understands you and all you're going through, maybe even the first meaningful physical touch you've had for month.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁴¹ Ibid., 24.

⁴² Brad Lewis, "Affairs/ Marital Infidelity," accessed 8 June 2009, <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/relationship-challenges/affairs-marital-infidelity/affairsmarital-infidelity>.

There is much reason why one has to be vigilant as the word of God warns: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Marital infidelity is likely to happen in both Christian and non-Christian homes because the enemy does not spare anyone. Therefore it is wise for every couple to be prepared for any assaults of the devil and be on the guard to be victors.

We have always been told that a good a victim of the opposite sex in counseling is the most vulnerable target for the one in need. He or she finds in the counselor what the spouse has not offered for the success of the relationship. Now the solution is staring you in the eye. Much prudence is needed in counseling sessions so that solving a problem does not create another problem. Further to God’s intention of marriage covenant between husband and wife the biblical understanding of the nature of marriage has been lost by many people today.

It has been clearly expressed by several Christian authors that there should be a biblical approach when it comes to marriage and the implications it carries. Failing to uplift and apply the biblical approach of intimacy would certainly bring disaster within the family entity. It is not enough to know these principles conducive for success in marital relationship the practical domain needs to be implemented by all.

The next chapter deals with action in order to understand the situation of marital challenges at the Saints Adventist Church in Seychelles. The procedure is discussed on the situation and evaluation for steps in addressing

the problems. The chapter also outlines data processing and interpretation of findings.

The following chapter deals with the analysis of the marital challenges in the Saints Adventist Church from the Seychelles Mission. The chapter describes the local setting and outlines how the study was carried out. It includes background of the Church, its location, socio-economical situation, educational situation, and background of religious beliefs. It also explains procedures and retrieval of instruments used for collecting data. Data presentation and analysis are also reflected. The chapter also concludes with data processing and interpretation of findings.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL SETTING

Background of the Saints Adventist Church

The Saints Adventist Church from the Seychelles Mission in the Indian Ocean Union experiences a series of disturbing trends annually. The Church leaders were very much concerned as to what strategies to take in order to change the trend of things. The Church Board took several steps in trying to improve the situation but failed consequently. The writer decided to embark on a special project in seeking solutions to the problems which were affecting the whole church at large. The following are among the marital challenges which affect marriage in the Saints Adventist Church in Seychelles: teenage pregnancies, common law living and divorce, being unequally yoked with unbelievers, living as a single parent, the issue of globalization, and the impact of the tourism industry.

The membership population in the country where the Saints Adventist Church is found is very young. Hence it presents major challenges to attend to the needs of this age group where decisions for relationships are made for better or for worse. Our mission as church leaders is to avoid the worse at all costs. The older members from the Saints Adventist church would disagree openly on the behavior the members from this young generation.

The most vulnerable group of members in the Saints Adventist Church was the young people age from 13 to 35 years. They are inexperienced in family issues especially if they come from non-Adventist backgrounds. Most of them have joined

the church through evangelistic campaigns where not all the fundamental beliefs are exposed in a comprehensive manner. They have been touched by the preaching of the gospel for around 3 weeks have discovered the Adventist beliefs only through nightly presentations of topics by the evangelist.

Location of Saints Adventist Church

Saints Adventist Church is in the Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division territory of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in the Indian Ocean Union, in the Seychelles Mission. The members of the Saints Church come from different districts of the main island of Mahé. The church is located in an area where residential homes are within 50 meters away hence very accessible and easy to observe the events going on. One can get to the church very easily by bus since the building is next to the main road.

Teenage Pregnancies

Every year an average of five teenagers get pregnant before marriage and the number of other premarital pregnancies continues to increase. What makes the situation a challenging one is the fact that some of the girls involved come from Adventist families. Parents in leading positions of the church feel shameful about the situations and some of them decline from their assigned duties. This creates pressure on the Church Board to replace the vacant posts. Older members are shocked in seeing such behavior since they testified that this was not the case before the past 20 years of Adventism in Seychelles. This alarming situation poses a negative impact on the other young people of the church because the church is teaching that sexual intimacy is reserved for marriage only while at the same time young girls are getting pregnant at an alarming rate. Questions arise whether this conduct is normal. The

leadership of the church is faced with a great challenge in dealing with this trend of issues.

Common Law Living and Divorce

Moreover, there are couples who live together under what is termed “common law” relationship without getting married legally. Between one and two couples at the Saints Adventist Church divorce every year and there are ten or more couples who experience serious challenges which might lead to separation or divorce. Some young people have expressed fears of getting married because of what they see in the church, and yet others have been forced to get married because of premarital sexual involvement. The writer observed that a significant percentage of such marriages end up in separation or divorce. This is observed especially when they come for counseling sessions following moments of crisis.

It has been observed that about one in every two Adventist church members who have accepted the Adventist faith were living in common-law relationships or families usually accepted by the general population including certain religious denominations. Normally, the church leaders and policy makers presented the ideal to the members but not much emphasis was being put to the actual practice of these ethical values. For instance, the researcher comes from a family of six children whereby three different fathers have been involved. Yet, the mother was an active member of a Christian denomination. Hence it was evident that the number of couples seeking divorce was on the increase in the whole country in general as well as in the Adventist Church where the Saints Adventist church was located.

Being Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers

There was also a tendency of young adults getting married with non-Adventists and later on the inevitable result was often divorce or continuous unpleasant conflict within the relationship. Ellen G. White expressed clearly that, “The iniquity that is cherished by young as well as old; the unwise, unsanctified courtship and marriages cannot fail to result in strife, in alienations, in indulgence of unbridled passions, in unfaithfulness of husbands and wives, unwillingness to restrain the self-willed inordinate desires, and in indifference to the things of eternal interest.”¹

The usual popular argument is that spouses outside the Adventist community are as good as those inside the church. When a couple comes to a minister to request marriage counseling in preparation for marriage it is made clear from the beginning that it will not be possible to make a knot where God has forbidden. In most cases, the decision has already been made and by whatever means the couple will go ahead with the decision to get married.

It has been observed that most of the young people who have a boyfriend or a girlfriend who is not from the church has a decreased spiritual involvement in the church. Early signs include refusal in accepting a church responsibility when church elections arrive, continuous absence at midweek prayer meetings, and continuous absence at special spiritual emphasis weeks, late coming to church services and most of the time not even carrying a Bible or church hymnal. If visitations are not being done for a while one of the inevitable consequences is an unwanted pregnancy. Though no proof has been shown for multiple occasions of abortion, signs have shown at a later time that there might have been a few cases especially following

¹ White, *The Adventist Home* [CD ROM].

incidents of complications whereby the pastor has been called for urgent prayer sessions in the hospital.

As a church minister with more than 10 years of experience in couples counseling, the writer observed in most cases of family breakdown the biblical principles were not followed seriously. For more than 20 couples that the researcher has asked the Lord's blessings upon in matrimony it was easy to follow the trends of success or failure in the relationships in relation to the family background of each couple. There were those who came at the last minute just to receive the blessing and the resulting difficulties for adjustments is still challenging for them.

Many people outside the Adventist Church wonder if these behaviors are in line with the principles taught by the Adventist Church. Something needs to be done urgently to remediate this trend.

Living as a Single Parent

The Saints Adventist church faces the reality of having a number of single parents in its midst. Most of them are as a result of new members joining the Church following an evangelistic campaign. There is much pressure being put on the Church leadership whenever Couples program are being organized. Surprisingly, some married couples complain about not having enough activities to cater for the single parents. Most of them are between 35 and 45 years old and thus expect to settle into a committed relationship. This creates a real challenge for the church especially when the single parent is a woman and having more than two children together with a low financial income. The temptation is that they get into a relationship with the motive of having financial and social security to the family. If the leadership of the church does nothing in such situations things will deteriorate and more members will have to go

through the process of church discipline due to the common-law living which persists even after being baptized into the church.

Another aspect of single parenting in the Saints Adventist church has been the case whereby the woman is advised to leave the man she was living with following an evangelistic campaign. Instead of counseling the couple to follow normal procedures to be married it appeared that the more zealous woman decides to leave the man in order to be baptized. Most of the cases have been total failure because after a week of separation the couple went back to live together for they have been living together for even more than ten years. The idea of asking the two to be separated because one of them desired to be baptized in the Adventist church has proved not to be the best solution.

The Issue of Globalization

In the book “Marriage and Family in African Christianity” by Andrew A. Kyomo and Sahaya G. Selvan, Evaristi Magoti defines globalization as the attempt to “express the process and the system of social, political and economic integration of the different parts of the world into a global village.”² This means that people tend to be involved in everything that goes on in the whole world just in being in their local community. Seychelles is not an exception as to what globalization has brought as a major challenge in family issues.

Today we can observe that most Seychellois have access to television, computers, mobile telephones and the internet in order to communicate with the

² Evaristi Magoti, “Globalisation and Family in Africa: An Appraisal of its Impact on African Families and the Christian Response,” in *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, ed. Andrew A Kyomo and Sahaya G. Selvan (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004), 53.

outside world as well as among one another in the community. These facilities most often are avenues which initiate immoral values to family members. Certain spouses have voiced out loud and clear that frequently their respective spouses spend a lot of time in sending small text messages (sms) to friends and thus interfere with the smooth running of the family activities. In certain instances some spouses reported of going out for other activities while the spouse is busy texting friends.

Recently, the author of this research had the privilege of attending a seminar being organized for parents with adolescents with the aim of educating parents about the risks behind the use of information technology especially mobile phones and the internet. It was amazing to discover that most parents who attended were almost ignorant as to what was happening with their adolescents who are continuously in touch with such technology. The young generation is capable of chatting with strangers far away through emails or mobile phones without the parents' awareness. The youth are exposed to adult pornography all throughout the day without the parents knowing what was happening to their teenagers. When parents are able to monitor their adolescents in relation to the use of such communication gadgets the later will be prudent in the use of such facilities.

The ultimate consequences of such uncontrolled communication facilities are exposure to pornography, being sexually active at an early age and even involvement in a relationship which has not been desired by the victim. These victims then have a negative attitude towards marriage and thus opt to follow the immoral degradation that is being exposed by the media.

Long ago people had to go to a movie theatre in order to watch a movie. Nowadays one only has to stay at home and just get online in order to choose what seem to be the pleasures of the individual visualizing these scenes. Parents who are

too busy with life and neglecting their children pay the consequences of losing their children at an early age immersed in immoral relationships.

The Impact of the Tourism Industry

Seychelles being a tourist destination attracts many tourists from around the world. Hence the local population being very small is easily influenced by the numerous visitors who come for holidays annually. The country has many touristic facilities which the local people are able to access as well. Hotels and guest houses are places where local people visit frequently in order to be in touch with prospective clients for their products. Most often the inexperienced young adult finds an open door to attract the visitor into an affair which so often ends with bitter consequences such as an unwanted pregnancy or being infected with a sexually transmitted disease. By the time the victim discovers his or her status the visitor has long left and never to be traced again.

Due to the recent economic breakdown around the world many wealthy visitors coming to the country have realized that the young people are easy preys to fall on in order to satisfy their personal pleasures. It has been observed that young children have been involved in prostitution at certain strategic spots in the capital city late in the evening. A local Non-Governmental organization decided to mount a program in order to reverse this behavior. The author of this research was interviewed so as to present the Adventist Church's response to such behavior. The main message was targeted towards the adults who were taking advantage of such immoral acts. Parents were not assuming their responsibility in monitoring their children in the evening. They were guilty of working extra hours in order to have a higher financial income, some just authorized their children to be out during the late hours and even

some were not even aware that the youngsters were out of the home. Such negligence in child monitoring have caused a lot of damage to families at large.

The challenge presented to all families was to spend quality time with their children so that solid bonds might be formed between parents and all other members of the family. Since Adventist children go to school with the same students involved in such behavior it is important that the parents of such children are able to follow their own children closely in communicating with them on a daily basis especially during family devotional time.

Political Situation

Seychelles is among the most peaceful small state islands in the world and has gone through several challenges of political development and stability. It has changed a lot during the past 15 years from a single party state to a multi-party regime. Actually it has a president and vice-president coming from the main Party, SPPF (Seychelles People's Progressive Front). The main Opposition Party is the SNP (Seychelles National Party). The people of Seychelles vote their president and legislative representatives every five years. Every person having 18 years of above are eligible to vote. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Seychelles usually participate actively during the elections. However, there is very minimum involvement in the political manifestations. Like any other faith based communities the Adventist Church has the freedom of worship without any harassment.

Socio-Economic Situation

The main income of the Seychelles economy is the Tourism Industry whereby the main clients come from Europe. The next source of income is fishing industry. Seychelles' geographical setting permits it to exploit the ocean for considerable

resources for local consumption as well as for exports. The national currency is Seychelles Rupees (SR) and its exchange is actually around SR 14.00 to the US\$. The average salary for local citizen is SR 2000.00 monthly. The majority of Seychellois people are able to afford a reasonable living lifestyle with at least 3 meals per day. The main local food consumption is fish, rice and a great variety of vegetables and tropical fruits.

Educational Setting

All Seychellois children have the privilege of benefitting through free education from pre-school through primary, secondary and college up to university. The government supplies free education for all as one of its strategy for educating the nation to high academic performances. There are a number of private schools as well where parents who can afford enroll their children for education.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Seychelles used to have a private primary school but the political situation of the country did not favor the continuation of the institution to date. Many attempts have been pursued in order to request for permission from the local authorities in order to re-launch a Church school.

Background of Religious Beliefs

It is said that the majority of the population is Christian and the percentage varies from 85% to 95% with small groups of Muslim, Baha'i, and Hindu faiths. The Roman Catholic Church is the majority among the Christian denomination followed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Anglican Church, Pentecostal Assembly, New Apostolic Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Though the country is known to be very religious most of religious people go to church services irregularly but mainly during the main special religious festivities of the year such as Easter and Christmas.

Christian values are being communicated mainly during church programs. Most members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Seychelles come one of the above mentioned denominations and most of the time it takes time for the newly baptized to get acquainted with the new “tradition” of Adventist living.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

Procedure

Following distribution of the 100 questionnaires the church clerk was requested to collect the completed forms at a given deadline so that the researcher could start organizing the data collected. However much emphasis being put to the importance of this activity only a limited number of questionnaires were returned at the deadline. One of the reasons was that several members hesitated to express freely about their actual situations mentioned in the questionnaire. The interview on the other hand went extremely well because the participants only had to answer the questions and the data was readily available following the appointment with the member.

Questionnaire Preparation

Sample questionnaires were compiled from the internet whereby the researcher considered many factors that could contribute to the analysis of the problem in Seychelles and from there got the feelings of the members on the most pertinent issues relating to marital challenges in Seychelles. Help was offered from an experienced elder who was willing to give his contribution having known the Seychelles’ culture very well. The most relevant issues to the Seychelles’ culture (marital relationship, parenting styles, lifestyle attitudes, factors affecting the health of family relationships, sexual related disorders, priority of family needs, and counseling

topics) were selected and drafted in several parts. Care was taken so that the participants would not take more than half an hour to fill the questionnaire.

Collection and Treatment of Data

Following collection of the questionnaires the researcher requested the help of his daughter to organize the data collected in counting and tallying the results accordingly. The use of a computer and calculator was seen to be very effective in this exercise. The gathered data was entered on excel spreadsheet which was easy for the calculations. Also it is worth noting that the involvement of family members was found to be very fruitful so as to better manage the hours being spent with these details. It was a tiresome work to be done but very worthwhile as the results would benefit many members of the local churches.

The following chapter deals with the data presentation and analysis of findings from the filled questionnaires and responses to the survey. The statistical figures indicate the scores and corresponding percentages in each question which are being illustrated in tables.

Questionnaire

Among the 100 questionnaires which were distributed to the members only 55 (55%) copies were returned within the date they were due. Among the 55 collected only 37 (67.3%) were successfully completed. The others were either partly completed or left blank exactly as they were given. With the help of family members the researcher took quite a while to compile the data carefully on excel spreadsheets and the percentages were calculated and tabulated accordingly. Below is the organization of the data collected for analysis.

General Information

According to the figures in Table 1, among the 37 successful participants 40.5% were male and the remaining 59.5% were female. It was good to have both genders participating in order to have a more realistic picture of the situation at the Saints Church.

Table 1. The Participants' Gender

Gender	Score	%	Cumulative %
Male	15	40.5	40.5
Female	22	59.5	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

Despite the fact that the questionnaires were also distributed to all four groups (see Table 2), only singles and married spouses returned the questionnaires. Among those 54% married spouses and 46% singles participated.

Table 2. The Participants' Marital Status

Marital Status	Score	%	Cumulative %
Married	17	45.9	45.9
Single	20	54.1	100.0
Divorced	0	0	100.0
Widowed	0	0	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

The researcher observed that though there were a number of singles with children in the Saints Church there was none who returned or the questionnaire (see

Table 3). However, the married spouses had an average of just over 1 child (1.2). The highest number of children recorded by a spouse was 6 and the lowest was zero.

Table 3. The Number of Children in the Family

No. of Children	Score	%	Cumulative %
1	16	43.2	43.2
2	7	19.0	62.2
3	8	21.6	83.8
4	3	8.1	91.9
5	2	5.4	97.3
6	1	2.7	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

As indicated in Table 4, most of the participants (62.2%) were 35 years old or less. This implies that the data collected concerned mainly the younger generation of Seventh-day Adventists. It is very obvious to observe at the official meetings of the church on Sabbath that most of the members are young. The older members usually are shut-ins and rarely come to church. There is therefore a tremendous challenge in reaching the young people even at an early age in order to educate the right way of Christian living.

Table 4. The Participants' Age Group

Age Group	Score	%	Cumulative %
Under 25 Years	16	43.2	43.2
26 to 35 Years	7	19.0	62.2
36 to 50 Years	10	27.0	89.2
51 to 65 Years	1	2.7	91.9
Over 65 Years	3	8.1	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

More than 70% of the participants had been SDA members for 15 years or less (see Table 5). Again this shows a young generation of members and again shows the challenges of church leadership to equip them for the future of the church.

Table 5. The Number of Years for Being in the Adventist Church

No. of Years	Score	%	Cumulative %
Under 5 Years	8	21.6	21.6
6-10 Years	10	27.0	48.6
11-15 Years	8	21.6	70.2
16-20 Years	4	10.8	81.0
Over 20 Years	7	19.0	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

Table 6 shows that among the participants in the survey slightly less than half the number of participants had all members of their family SDA oriented (48.6%)

Table 6. Adventist Family Orientation

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	18	48.6	48.6
No	19	51.4	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

As it can be observed in Table 7 most participants (56.8%) had not spent their teen-age years in the SDA Church.

Table 7. Spending Teen-age Years in the Adventist Church

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	16	43.2	43.2
No	21	56.8	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

As shown in Table 8, more than two-thirds of the participants (67.6%) did not have adolescent children.

Table 8. Having Adolescent Children in the Family

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	12	32.4	43.2
No	25	67.6	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

Two-thirds (62.2%) of the group of members surveyed (see Table 9) did not have an SDA heritage. This means that most of the participants came to the church through conversion quite recently. With the local context of permitted common-law living from previous denominations the issue of education here is of primary importance. If this is not done in time there will be increased apostasy and heresies creeping the church in a subtle but destructing manner. It is never bad to put continuous emphasis on the urgent need of educating new converts of the church.

Table 9. Having a Seventh-day Adventist Heritage

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	14	37.8	37.8
No	23	62.2	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

As Table 10 shows, most of the participants (86.5%) were not leaders in the Family Ministries department of their church. When a member is not actively involved in a particular ministry there will be a number of challenges that will need important attention from the church leadership.

Table 10. Being Involved in the Family Ministries Department of the Church

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	5	13.5	13.5
No	32	86.5	100.0
Total	37	100.0	

Survey Results on the Church Congregation

The results in Table 11 below clearly indicate that the participants felt that their congregation had positive qualities and an environment whereby they could get something if they were actively involved. However, the general tendency is more towards uncertainty rather than agreeing strongly.

Table 11. Survey Questions on the Church Congregation

Questions	M	%
1. My congregation feels like a large, close-knit family	3.4	68%
2. My congregation is spiritually vital and alive	3.2	64%
3. My congregation helps members deepen relationship with God	3.6	72%
4. My congregation is a moral beacon in the community	3.8	76%
5. My congregation welcomes innovation and change	2.9	78%
6. My congregation deals openly with disagreements and conflicts	3.0	60%
7. Members are excited about the future of our congregation	3.2	64%
8. My congregation easily incorporates new members	4.0	80%
9. My congregation has a clear sense of mission and purpose	3.7	74%
10. Our worship services are spiritually uplifting	4.3	86%
11. Sermons in my congregation are relevant and inspiring	4.3	86%
12. My congregation's programs and activities are well-organized	3.2	64%
13. My congregation is focused on winning souls for Jesus	3.6	72%
14. Input from lay members is sought in making decisions	3.9	78%
15. I love attending the Sabbath services of my congregation	3.4	68%
16. I attend spiritual services of my congregation regularly	3.3	66%
17. I participate in family oriented programs actively	3.0	60%
18. My spiritual gifts and talents are employed in my congregation	3.2	64%
19. I hold an office of service position in my congregation	3.2	64%
20. I enjoy and find satisfying the tasks I do in my church	3.6	72%
21. I find various ways to share my faith with non-members	3.1	62%
22. I am a member of a small group in which we pray for each other	2.8	56%
23. I am happy about the music offered in congregational services	3.2	64%
24. I am happy about the services offered for all family groups	3.4	68%
25. My congregation is a very friendly place to come	4.3	86%
26. Visitors to my congregation receive a warm welcome	4.6	92%
27. I feel very attached to my congregation	4.3	86%
28. I invite friends, neighbors, or relatives to attend church with me	3.9	78%
29. The members of our congregation are provided with training	3.8	76%
30. I'm never bored with the worship services in my church	4.1	82%
31. Church discipline is administered firmly but in love	4.0	80%
32. My spiritual needs are being well-met in my congregation	4.1	82%

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.

Survey Results on the Marital Relationship

The participants felt strongly positive about their contribution to the marriage relationship (see Table 12). In the practical sense it is not always the case when the comments are requested on behalf of the spouse.

Table 12. Survey Questions on the Marriage Relationship

Questions	M	%
33. Pleased with expressions of affection	4.0	80%
34. Happy with resolution of conflicts	3.9	78%
35. Happy with handling of role responsibilities	3.7	74%
36. Needs are met in the relationship	4.2	84%
37. Please about sexual relationship	4.2	84%
38. Happy about managing time spent together	3.6	72%
39. Happy about managing parenting tasks	3.8	76%
40. Happy about communication with my spouse	3.4	68%
41. Would marry the same person again if need be	4.4	88%
42. Happy with practice of religious beliefs	4.5	90%
43. Pleased with personal habits of spouse	4.1	82%
44. Satisfied with relationship with in-laws	4.4	88%
45. I feel that my partner understands me	4.1	82%
46. Satisfied with relationship with my parents	4.7	94%
47. Happy with how we make financial decisions	4.2	84%
48. Can easily practice forgiveness in relationship	4.1	82%
49. Satisfied with realization of expectations	4.2	84%

Note. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

Parenting Styles

The respondents were positive towards disciplining their children in a loving consultative manner instead of using physical approaches. Here the respondents were not too sure or would not agree that the rebellious children were put in correction centers or being disciplined physically.

Table 13. Survey Questions on Parenting Styles

Questions	M	%
50. Children independence must be encouraged	4.4	88%
51. Strong parental control must be encouraged	4.4	88%
52. More child guidance and reasoning are needed	4.5	90%
53. Children must be punished in non-physical ways	4.0	80%
54. Children must be punished physically as well	2.8	56%
55. More affection must be expressed to children	4.0	80%
56. Control of anger and conflict between parent and child	4.0	80%
57. Parents should set strict rules for teenagers	4.3	86%
58. Parents should put their rebellious in correction centers	2.7	54%
59. Parents should invest quality time with each child	4.6	92%
60. Parents should dialogue with their children regularly	4.7	94%

Note. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

Lifestyle Attitudes

The researcher observed from the responses that they clearly understood the Biblical principles in sexual issues and church discipline (see Table 13). They know exactly what the church teaches about moral issues. The challenges therefore come from the implementation of this knowledge in the everyday life. We can say for sure that it is not the lack of knowledge that destroys family relationships but the application of knowledge in life experiences.

Table 14. Survey Questions on Lifestyle Attitudes

Questions	M	%
61. Abortion is never an option for Christians	3.7	74%
62. Celibate homosexuals may be accepted into the church	1.4	28%
63. Pre-marital sex is not wrong if there is real love	1.4	28%
64. Masturbation is not a problem provided it is private and secret	2.1	42%
65. Pre-marital sex is not wrong if the couple has been engaged	1.2	24%
66. Pre-marital sex is not wrong if there is no pregnancy	1.2	24%
67. Marriage is an obligation if the girl is pregnant for the boy	2.6	52%
68. The only problem with unprotected sex is HIV and AIDS	2.0	40%
69. It's okay for a girl to sleep in the same house as her boyfriend	1.7	34%
70. It's okay for a couple to live together before marriage	1.4	28%
71. Okay for two young people to indulge in heavy petting	1.6	32%
72. Youths indulged in sex should be encouraged to get married	3.8	76%
73. Ladies over 24 should have children even if not married	1.3	26%
74. Woman may have a child with another man if husband is barren	1.0	20%
75. Adventist position on divorce needs revision	3.4	68%
76. Family planning through birth control should be encouraged	3.7	74%
77. Sex in marriage should celebrate love and spiritual intimacy	4.5	90%
78. Virginity is not very important in the married life	2.7	54%
79. A couple who has been engaged must definitely get married	3.8	76%
80. Homosexuality not wrong if it is in a lifetime commitment	1.0	20%
81. Church should provide organized sex education for youth	4.7	94%
82. Remarriage after divorce ok only for adultery or spouse's death	3.7	74%
83. Remarriage ok after both guilty parties have repented	3.7	74%
84. Wrong for married person to have sex with anyone but spouse	4.8	96%
85. Abortion wrong except for rape, incest, and save mother's life	4.2	84%
86. Abortion ok to avoid church discipline and embarrassment	1.0	20%

Note. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

Factors Affecting the Health of Family Relationships

A significant observation made on the results in Table 14 shows that though Seychelles being a tourist destination the respondents did not think that such activities affect the health of family relationships. However, many young people outside the church are attracted to the visitors as they visit the country year in year out.

Table 15. Survey Questions on Factors Affecting the Health of Family Relationships

Questions	M	%
1. Exposure to the internet	3.9	78%
2. Tourism industry	3.2	64%
2. Use of mobile phones	4.3	86%
3. Our tropical climate	3.9	78%
4. Movies	4.1	42%
5. Late night activities	4.3	86%
6. Night clubs and discotheques	4.4	88%
7. Illegal drugs and alcohol	4.3	86%
8. Frequent overseas travel	4.0	80%
9. Lack of proper education	4.0	80%
10. End time conditions	4.2	84%
11. Negligence of parents	4.1	82%
12. Peer pressure	4.1	82%
13. Social culture in parties	4.0	80%
14. Continuous at risk behaviors	4.3	86%
15. Low moral values	4.1	82%
16. Bad role models	4.2	84%
17. Rebellious attitudes	4.1	82%
18. High exposure to temptations	4.2	84%
19. Busy parents	4.2	84%

Note. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

Sexual Disorders

Respondents were asked to evaluate the gravity of sexual problems and disorders in the church (see Table 15). Sad to say, the response of the participants indicate that there certain sexual related disorders which affect the church in a way or the other. However, it is worth noted that most of the cases of adultery and marital conflict involved couples which had spouses outside the church.

Table 16. Survey Questions on Sexual Related Disorders

Questions	M	%
20. Adultery	4.2	84%
21. Pre-marital sex	3.2	64%
22. Unfaithfulness of the spouse	3.1	62%
23. Living together without being married	3.0	60%
24. Sexually active adolescents	3.8	76%
25. Abortion	2.8	56%
26. Marital conflict	3.9	78%
27. Divorce	3.5	70%
28. Homosexuality	1.3	26%
29. Pornography	3.1	62%
30. Physical abuse	1.8	36%
31. Emotional and verbal abuse	2.6	52%
32. Sexual abuse or incest	1.4	28%

Note. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

Rating the Priority of Needs

Respondents were asked to rate the following items in terms of priority for church programs which would help the church improve and strengthen their family units. The responses are found in Table 16. The general feeling from the respondents indicates that the majority feel the urgency of family oriented programs. The scores were more towards strongly agreeing that the above programs are in high priority with all the scores above 4.

Table 17. Survey Questions on Needs for Church Programs

Questions	M	%
33. Pre-marital counseling or education	4.8	96%
34. Marriage strengthening programs	4.9	98%
35. Marriage renewal programs	4.7	94%
36. Parenting education	4.8	96%
37. Sex education	4.8	96%
38. Singles ministry	4.6	92%
39. Couple's Club	4.9	98%
40. Men's Club	4.4	88%
41. Communication skills seminar	4.8	96%
42. Divorce recovery programs	4.7	94%
43. Family conflict management seminar	4.8	96%
44. Grief recovery programs	4.6	92%
45. Addiction recovery support groups	4.3	86%
46. Referral list of Christian family counselors	4.2	84%
47. Family counseling centre	4.4	88%
48. Training in moral decision-making	4.2	84%
49. Training in Biblical Christian values	4.5	90%
50. Need of Family Ministries Director	4.6	92%
51. Need of Family Ministries Committee	4.7	94%

Note. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

Rating of Premarital Counseling Topics

After tabulating the responses of the participants in the survey the following results were observed starting from 1 as the top priority and 20 as the least priority:

1. Church, Religion and God
2. Love Commitment
3. Communication Skills
4. Spiritual Growth
5. Family Worship
6. Courtship
7. Forgiveness
8. Christian Stewardship
9. Family Budget
10. Work and Career

11. Conflict Resolution
12. Social Activities
13. Roles of Spouses
14. The Role of In-Laws
15. Relationship with Friends
16. Sexual Intimacy and Faithfulness
17. Birth Control
18. The Wedding Ceremony
19. Family Crisis
20. Divorce

With such responses, I have designed my premarital counseling sessions with the above topics in the same order. However, I adapt to the different couples depending on their most urgent need at the moment I start my sessions with them.

Interview

The use of the data collected from the interviews reveal other factors to support the urgent needs to be addressed at the local churches in Seychelles. Data in Table 17 indicates that the group of respondents was quite young with 60% married for less than 15 years. It was a good group to work with as it is easier to start a series of programs with them than the older members.

Table 18 shows that only 8 (32%) of the respondents had an Adventist heritage. Again this shows a new generation of Adventists where the principles of the church need to be instilled for positive outcome of moral behavior.

Table 18. Length of Time Being Married

Length of Time	Score	%	Cumulative %
Under 6 Months	1	4.0	4.0
6-12 Months	4	16.0	20.0
1-5 Years	3	12.0	32.0
5-10 Years	4	16.0	48.0
10-15 Years	3	12.0	60.0
15-20 Years	4	16.0	76.0
20-25 Years	3	12.0	88.0
Over 25 Years	3	12.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

Table 19. Having Adventist Heritage

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	8	32.8	32.0
No	17	68.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

From Table 19 we can observe that only 32.8% of the interviewees followed marital counseling before getting married. That's a very unfortunate situation for such couples. Before venturing in an experience it is of golden importance that the partners are aware of and put into practice the principles for them to succeed. Too many have failed in this area and the consequences follow through throughout the lifetime.

Table 20. Followed Marital Counseling before Getting Married

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	10	40.0	40.0
No	25	60.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

Table 20 shows how long the counseling program was among those who answered yes to the question above. The results indicate that the spouses who had marital counseling did it in a quite short period of time. Normally I request that my clients follow the whole program of pre-marital counseling for at least 4 months in order to be very versed in the principles of married life.

Table 21. Length of Time That Marital Counseling Had Occurred

Length of Time	Score	%	Cumulative %
Below 1 Month	4	40.0	40.0
1-3 Months	5	50.0	90.0
Above 3 Months	1	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

When asked what were the most important lessons learnt during their counseling sessions, the following responses were given.

1. Both partners need to love unconditionally
2. Intimacy with God will improve intimacy with one another
3. Proper Communications are necessary for growth
4. Much tolerance are needed
5. Patience has to be exercised

6. Partners have to forgive very often
7. Both partners need to share the burdens together

The following were given as the ten most important topics to be learnt before getting married.

1. The Principle of Love
2. Spirituality of the Couple
3. Communication Skills
4. Forgiveness
5. Management of Finance
6. Family Planning and Children
7. Crisis Management
8. Conflict Management
9. Relationship with In-laws
10. Roles of Spouses

As observed in Table 21, more than half (52%) of the respondents had children before getting married. If the biblical principles are not laid down to them immediately this trend might just continue to perpetuate among their children.

Table 22. Having Children before Getting Married

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	13	52.0	52.0
No	12	48.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

When couples are not involved in activities organized for their nurture and growth they will not be expected to grow automatically. The experience it is always the inactive members who create more problems in the community of believers. Table 22 shows that more than 50% (56%) of the respondent are not involved in couples-related activities of the church, which makes it a real challenge for growth in the domain of family life.

Table 23. Involvement in Couples-Related Activities of the Church

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	11	44.0	44.0
No	14	56.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

The respondents were asked how much time they spent with their spouse in prayer and Bible study. In the responses in Table 23, note that only 3 participants (12%) spent the whole week in prayer and Bible study with the spouse. Surprisingly 36% of the respondents did not spend time with their spouses for a whole week. Lacking in this area will bring a bitter ending in such families especially when challenges come their way.

Table 24. Average Time Spent in Prayer and Bible Study with Spouse Daily

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Not at all	9	36.0	36.0
1-2 Days/Week	4	16.0	52.0
3-4 Days/Week	7	28.0	80.0
5-6 Days/Week	2	8.0	88.0
7 Days/Week	3	12.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

From the results in Table 24, we see that 56% of the respondents did not go to church with their spouse regularly. These are most likely the ones who will not be able to apply the Biblical principles for strong relationships in the home. We can imagine the impact this situation will have on the children in such homes. It has been observed that most families who go to church together are those who are active in church activities. On the other hand the families where members go to church by themselves either come late for service or quite a number of them do not come to church regularly or not at all.

Table 25. Spouses Attending Church Together

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	11	44.0	44.0
No	14	56.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

The figures in Table 25 are quite alarming. They show that 84% of the people interviewed did not spend vacation time with their spouse every year. Strong family bonds are formed and developed when family members spend quality and quantity time together.

Table 26. Couples Spending Vacation Together Every Year

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	4	16.0	16.0
No	21	84.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

Among the married spouses interviewed, about three quarters (72%) did not celebrate their wedding anniversary every year (Table 26). Most of them do not have the habit of doing so and thus miss the blessings that could have been experienced by the parties. During Couples' Club meetings it is often heard that the spouses do not practice this tradition simply because they don't see the necessity in doing so. However, those who do it express the fun of it and several couples mentioned about "renewing the honeymoon fun." My wife and I still cherish the great moments of wedding renewal during our 5th, 10th and 15th wedding anniversaries and we are looking forward to our 20th anniversary and beyond. It's so exciting to just think about it.

Table 27. Couples Celebrating Wedding Anniversary Yearly

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Yes	7	28.0	28.0
No	18	72.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

When asked how they would evaluate their marital relationship at this moment, the answers were equally disturbing (see Table 27). Only one-third (8 = 32%) of the interviewed spouses evaluated their marital relationship as being very good, excellent or perfect. These figures indicate that there is much to be done in order to improve the situation.

Table 28. Evaluation of the Marital Relationship

Response	Score	%	Cumulative %
Perfect	1	4.0	4.0
Excellent	2	8.0	12.0
Very Good	5	20.0	32.0
Good	6	24.0	56.0
Average	5	20.0	76.0
Poor	4	16.0	92.0
Not Sure	2	8.0	100.0
Total	25	100.0	

Interviewees were also asked about what they thought were the five main factors of couples' conflicts today. The responses they gave are as follows:

1. Overworking
2. Financial Challenges
3. Poor Spirituality
4. Lack of Proper Communication
5. Rebellious children

These five factors were strongly expressed as most common from the interviewed group. Most of them were the personal experiences that the spouses mentioned and some were even bold enough to confess that it was their own weakness. With the ongoing economic crisis around the world as well as within the local setting spouses occasionally broke into open disputes because the income was less than what they had planned to spend. Poor spirituality within the family circle will worsen the relationship and lack of proper communication will surely be a result and of course children will rebel against their parents as well as any level of authority.

Interviewees were also asked what activities would enhance strong couples' relationships in their local church. They said the following things:

1. Regular Couples Club
2. Couples Seminars
3. Parenting Seminars
4. Involvement of all members of the family in church programs
5. Pre-marital counseling sessions for young members
6. More sermons on family issues

The responses show a willingness to have programs to cater for couples' needs.

Interviewees were also asked how they could personally help other couples in the church. They suggested the following:

1. Mentoring
2. Prayer Partners
3. Visitation
4. Prayer House Meeting
5. Financial Support

The researcher found it interesting that some participants in the interview volunteered to offer help in the field they thought they could. From the above list it is indicative that the church leadership should take advantage of the offers and permit the families to receive the appropriate assistance immediately.

When asked about their recommendations for leadership towards couples of their church, the following ideas were given.

1. More Visitations
2. More Sermons
3. More Prayer Sessions for Families
4. More Supportive
5. Less Criticisms

The requests were very clear for the leadership to follow so as to bring the change in the families. Most of the requests involved members being touched

personally. The members needed a lot more support than we usually offer. The situations worsen because of criticism and not being readily available to offer a shoulder or our ears to listen to their needs.

CHAPTER 4

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO MARITAL CHALLENGES IN THE SAINTS ADVENTIST CHURCH

This chapter deals with actions taken in order to remediate the marital challenges in the Saints Adventist Church. The responses from the questionnaire and the survey revealed to the researcher several reasons to the cause of marital breakdowns in the Adventist families in Seychelles: The points below give a summary of the findings:

1. Poor Biblical Foundations among adult family members
2. Lack of active participation in church programs
3. Limited programs where positive family life is promoted
4. Limited fellowshipping among couples on special occasions
5. Limited involvement in important family oriented programs of the church.
6. Insufficient preparations of couples in premarital counseling sessions.
7. Couples were not enjoying their relationship as the marriage covenant.
8. A number of members were married to unbelievers.
9. Compromise among converted members brings along with them in the church practices which are not in line with Biblical principles.

Specific solutions to the marital challenges in the Saints Adventist church may include but not limited to the following:

1. Regular Marriage Education in the Saints Adventist Church: Such continuous marriage education would permit the members in the Saints

Adventist Church to be reminded of the basic principles for and continuous growth success in the families.

2. Comprehensive Pre-Marital Counseling Sessions for Couples who are planning to be married: This will enable every single couple to be thoroughly prepared before sealing their lifelong covenant in matrimony.
3. Crafting Marriage Mission Statements for Married Couples: This will be a constant reminder to every married couple and motivate all aspiring couples to understand what getting married is all about.
4. Regular Retreats for Marriage Enrichment: This will permit to rekindle marriage covenants on a yearly basis for all couples including newlyweds.
5. Yearly Marriage Emphasis Week: In the same manner as the church experiences prayer week emphasis couples will be able to rededicate their marriage covenant.
6. Special recognitions for couples celebrating their wedding anniversaries: Couples appreciate when their special days are being reminded by church leaders. A small token might be given in remembrance of the event such as a flower or a card signed by leaders and married couples of the church.
7. Marriage Renewal Ceremony at the end of the year: This will remind couples of their wedding day and rededicate their marriage covenant.
8. Organized visitation programs to every single couples of the church: This can be done by the church pastor and elders at least once every quarter. During such visits might last for 15 minutes can include sharing of challenges and praying for the couple and members of the family.

Strategic Plan

The results of the findings permitted the writer to construct a short and long term strategic plan in order to address the situation. These are presented in Tables 28 and 29. It was essential that the Conference oversees that all the churches within its territory applied the different activities as outlined from the findings of the research at the Saint's Adventist Church. The year-end committee of the Conference approved that much attention is being paid to family issues. Each pastor would meet with local churches in the area and work out plans in solving the actual trends of the local church. The researcher was the one responsible to monitor that the exercise was done in every single church.

January – June 2008

As anticipated by the strategic plan from January to June 2008 the pastors, elders and departmental directors of the Conference offered sensitization programs targeting all leaders from pastors to elders and departmental directors at the Conference and local churches. This permitted the leaders to have one purpose in being active in the remedial process.

July – December 2008

From July to December 2008 the leaders were ready to present the sensitizing programs at the local churches. By then the resources available were organized for presentations by PowerPoint, quizzes, role plays and sketches with the participation of the participants present. This was done through afternoon programs on Saturdays whereby the most important target was the young people. Since the Adventist Youth department already had Adventist Youth meetings in the afternoon from 3:00 pm. to 5:00 pm. it was not difficult to get the people. Materials used were from the book

Table 29. Strategic Plan Addressing Marital Challenges in Saints Adventist Church: December 2007 – December 2008

Date	Activities	Participants	Responsible	Remarks
December 2007	Mission Board approving the program	Board members, departmental directors and pastors	The Researcher	Every leader should be aware of the seriousness of the problem.
January to June 2008	Sensitization of leaders, organization for effective visitation programs	Pastors, Elders and departmental directors	The Researcher, Pastors and Elders	Visitation Programs should be very well organized so that no one is missed in the process
July to December 2008	Active participation in Family Evangelism, Premarital Counseling Sessions	All Church members, young adults, and couples contemplating marriage	Pastors and Elders	All couples have to undergo a complete series of premarital counseling sessions comprising of 20 topics. ¹

Table 30. Strategic Plan Addressing Marital Challenges in Saints Adventist Church: January – June 2009

January– March 2009	Launching of Family Evangelism Year, Family Week, Emphasis for Family Worships, Sermons and Couples Club	Family units, couples and Church members	Pastor, Elders and Family Ministries Director	Most churches now have a Couples Club which meets at least once every quarter.
April–June 2009	Continuous Evaluation and Assessment Exercises	All churches	Pastors and Elders	Reporting to local churches of the results.

¹ See Appendix B (VII).

“Messages to Young People” by Ellen G. White. Furthermore, the Conference voted a recommendation that all the churches study the book “Messages to the Young People” during the mid-week prayer meeting. This idea was very well accepted by all the churches. In order to make the presentations lively special tokens in the form of bookmarks, books and other educational items were offered to those who participated actively in the programs.

One particular emphasis being put during the sessions was the importance that all young people contemplating marriage should follow the whole series of premarital counseling prior to getting married. The ordained pastors were reminded to consider this issue very seriously so as to avoid the previous trends of family breakdowns which were caused from the lack of the implication of this principle.

January – March 2009

The first quarter of 2009 was marked by the official launching of the Family Evangelism Year. Much emphasis was put during the first part of the quarter for all churches to involve the maximum possible members in family evangelism. The Family Ministries director from the Conference met with all the family ministries directors from the churches in order to have a day of prayer and promotion for the year to be successful. Testimonies were being shared during the session about how the Lord can use families to share biblically based principles to other people of the community.

During this exercise it was noticed that the participants were blessed themselves and were able to motivate their immediate family members to be involved during the year of family evangelism,

The Family Week in February was very well used with a series of topics organized and distributed by the family ministries department of the Conference. One strategy used during the family week was that the daily readings were done in homes rather than the traditional way of doing it at the church. On Wednesday all the families gathered at the church for sharing and testimonies. The normal attendance at Wednesday prayer meeting at the Saints Church was 30 to 40 members including the children. During this particular week the count raised to 120 members.

Following this experience the members suggested that the meetings in the homes continue and for some homes a specific day was chosen whereby members of two or three families would meet for Bible studies with the objective of nurturing church members on family issues and also inviting non Adventists to benefit from the presentations.

It was observed that many families ignited or started experiencing the joy of family worship which was not functioning properly prior to the program during the first quarter of 2009. Together with the family oriented sermons every quarter the churches started to be revived in family issues especially the Saint's church where the project was targeted.

One good thing from the Saint's Church was the launching of the Couple's Club. During the first meeting in March 2009 there were 15 couples out of around 40 couples who attended the meeting which took place in nature on a Sunday afternoon. During the session the researcher who led the program with his wife touched sensitive issues which the couples realized were timely. There were two non-Adventist couples who attended and they expressed their appreciation in being blessed from the presentations and the fellowship. Couples celebrating their wedding anniversaries were able to share testimonies so as to encourage other couples present. In closing the

meeting every single couple was challenged to visit and encourage another couple in attending the future Couple's Club organized for the year.

April – June 2009

During the 3 months following the first quarter launching of the family evangelism week much emphasis was put for follow-up on what has been done so far. The Personal Ministries director from the Conference worked with the Family Ministries director to continuously motivate families to be active in applying the principles appropriate for real growth in all the churches. A special commission comprising of the Family Ministries director, the Personal Ministries director, the Children's Ministries director and Adventist Youth director from the Conference would meet regularly so as to find ways in encouraging all members of the family to be involved in their respective clubs or ministries of the church.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Following the findings in this research project the researcher has noted that the best way to solve the problem of family breakdown and moral degradation among the members is to implement powerful programs of education, trainings, sensitization, empowerment and mentoring of the members.

In order to accomplish the above goal there should be short term and long term programs. These programs would be implemented through seminars, training workshops, counseling sessions, sermons, special week emphasis, and visitation.

It has been observed through this study that the Saints Adventist Church has been lacking a lot in implementing the biblical principles of strong marital and family principles. If the leadership of the church at large apply the principles in their own families and then share with fellow members there will be tremendous improvement in the marital and family life of the church members. The strategic plan presented permitted the leadership and the Church membership at the Saints Adventist Church to be involved in the organized programs and practice the biblical principles of strong family relationship for continuous growth.

The year 2009 being the year of Family Evangelism, the leaders were exposed with the challenge to involve all members of the family in the program. Involvement of every single member of the family in evangelism would permit everyone to be helping others. Local Pastors and Elders would be responsible to monitor the running

of the proposed activities and report to respective church Boards. The Board would then report to the Mission's Office whereby the executive secretary of the Mission would evaluate the progress of the situation from each local church.

Since the beginning of 2008 Statistical reports sent to the Mission indicated major improvement compared to previous years prior to 2006. The members disciplined due to misconduct in moral issues or family breakdown decreased considerably. For the first quarter of 2009 there has been only one case of discipline due to moral issues relating to premarital or extramarital relationships compared to the previous years where 5 to 6 cases were recorded.

The best method to resolve the marital challenges in the Seventh-day Adventist church in Seychelles is to apply all the existed fundamental principles of strong family bonds beginning at the early age in the home. Parents are responsible for the health, the constitution, the development of the character of their children. No one else should be left to accomplish this task.¹

Recommendations

The researcher offers several recommendations that would hopefully help the Seventh-day Adventist church in Seychelles to overcome the many marital challenges that families and individuals encounter in their walk with the Lord Jesus.

Following series of evangelistic campaigns new members urgently need to be instructed of the Adventist and Biblical lifestyle practices. It will be of profound help to these new converts to expose them to a series of family seminars whereby they will be nurtured and anchored in these very important practices.

¹ White, *Adventist Home*, 187.

Another proposed remedy could be the creation of a special study class whereby the new members are taught on a weekly basis the fundamental principles of family life especially in courtship and marriage. A copy of the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs is given as gifts to newly baptized members the very same day of their baptism.

The researcher also strongly recommends that all ordained ministers should refuse to proceed with a marriage blessing prior to completion of the complete premarital counseling sessions.

Another remedy proposed involves mentoring the new members who just joined the church. The researcher remembers when joining the church that he was given a mature male adult to be his mentor for a number of months. If this is done purposefully where relationship is concerned many errors will be avoided in years to come. The personal touch is always more powerful in mentoring rather than sending a document or preaching from the pulpit.

One important and powerful way in remedying the problem of marital problems is to start very early in one's own family. As a father of four daughters including two adolescents the researcher is so excited about instructing his own children in the right way of purity.

In watching them grow he realizes how important for early education to take place at home before the church or school start educating them on sexual issues and relationships. There is a popular proverb from the word of God which should motivate us in training our children so that they can grow to become responsible adults (Prov 22:6).

Conclusion

To conclude, the researcher shares his vision for a church that will be pure as well as a safe and healthy place for its members and their children in the generations to come. A pure church will only exist when its members live up to the standards of Heaven as clearly stated by the word of God and expanded by Ellen G. White as well as numerous Christian authors around the globe. All leaders must join forces together to lead our members back to the biblical foundation of marriage so that we do not neutralize the principles being laid since the foundation of this world. Despite the many challenges of the end time we are living now we can be more than conquerors through Christ our Lord and Savior. The researcher's dream is founded in Joshua's response when he declared: "... *But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*" (Josh 24:15).

APPENDIX A

LETTERS



Seychelles Mission
P.O. Box 28, Victoria, Mahé,
SEYCHELLES

Tel.: (248) 266017/266193, FAX: (248) 266785
E-mail: advent7@inteltvision.net



Monday 12th November 2007

Dear brother and sister _____

I am conducting a research on the marital challenges in the Seventh-day Adventist church in Seychelles. I would be grateful if you can make yourself available in order to answer a few questions so as to help me develop the topic.

Thanking you for your kind and Christian support.

Yours sincerely,

Pastor Michael Bijoux
Church Pastor.



Seychelles Mission
P.O. Box 28, Victoria, Mahé,
SEYCHELLES



Tel.: (248) 266017/266193, FAX: (248) 266785
E-mail: advent7@inteltvision.net

Saint Louis, Mahé.

Wednesday 20th July 2007

Dear church member,

I am doing a study on the actual situation of our church at Saint Louis where family relationship is concerned. You are being invited to participate in this survey. The result of this study are intended to enhance the role of the pastor, church leaders and all church members as they work together to make ministry more effective in upholding the biblical principles of family life. Please do not write your name on any part of this document. Answer all questions in the spaces provided.

Upon completion of this questionnaire I would be grateful if you drop it in the box provided at the back of the church or simply hand it over to one of the deacon on service. Your consent to complete this form implies that you are giving permission for the results to be included in the study.

In order to analyze the responses of this questionnaire in good time it will be advisable for you to send back the completed document by Wednesday 31st October 2007.

Thank you for your participation.

Yours sincerely,

Pastor Michael Bijoux
Church Pastor.

No

7. Have you spent your teen-age years in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Yes

No

8. Do you have adolescent children in your family?

Yes

No

9. Do you have an Seventh-day Adventist heritage?

Yes

No

10. Are you involved in the Family Ministries department of your church?

Yes

No

(B) Your Congregation

(Please circle the number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with the statements as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

- | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. My congregation feels like a large, close-knit family | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 2. My congregation is spiritually vital and alive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 3. My congregation helps members deepen relationship with God | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 4. My congregation is a moral beacon in the community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 5. My congregation welcomes innovation and change | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. My congregation deals openly with disagreements and conflicts | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Members are excited about the future of our congregation | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. My congregation easily incorporates new members | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 9. My congregation has a clear sense of mission and purpose | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Our worship services are spiritually uplifting | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Sermons in my congregation are relevant and inspiring | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. My congregation's programs and activities are well-organized | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. My congregation is focused on winning souls for Jesus | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Input from lay members is sought in making decisions | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I love attending the Sabbath services of my congregation | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. I attend spiritual services of my congregation regularly | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I participate in family oriented programs actively | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. My spiritual gifts and talents are employed in my congregation | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I hold an office of service position in my congregation | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I enjoy and find satisfying the tasks I do in my church | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. I find various ways to share my faith with non-members | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. I am a member of a small group in which we pray for each other | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. I am happy about the music offered in congregational services | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. I am happy about the services offered for all family groups | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. My congregation is a very friendly place to come | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Visitors to my congregation receive a warm welcome | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. I feel very attached to my congregation | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. I invite friends, neighbors, or relatives to attend church with me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. The members of our congregation are provided with training | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. I'm never bored with the worship services in my church | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. Church discipline is administered firmly but in love | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. My spiritual needs are being well-met in my congregation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

(I) Marital Relationship:

How do you rank your personal contribution towards your marital satisfaction? (Please circle the number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with the statements as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Pleased with expressions of affection | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 2. Happy with resolution of conflicts | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Happy with handling of role responsibilities | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Needs are met in the relationship | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Please about sexual relationship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 6. Happy about managing time spent together | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Happy about managing parenting tasks | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 8. Happy about communication with my spouse | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 9. Would marry the same person again if need be | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 10. Happy with practice of religious beliefs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 11. Pleased with personal habits of spouse | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 12. Satisfied with relationship with in-laws | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 13. I feel that my partner understands me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 14. Satisfied with relationship with my parents | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Happy with how we make financial decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 16. Can easily practice forgiveness in relationship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 17. Satisfied with realization of expectations | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

(II) Parenting Styles

How do you rate the following parenting styles personally as they should be in reality? (Please circle the number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with the statements as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Children independence must be encouraged | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 2. Strong parental control must be encouraged | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. More child guidance and reasoning are needed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 4. Children must be punished in non-physical ways | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Children must be punished physically as well | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 6. More affection must be expressed to children | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 7. Control of anger and conflict between parent and child | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 8. Parents should set strict rules for teenagers | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Parents should put their rebellious in correction centers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 10. Parents should invest quality time with each child | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Parents should dialogue with their children regularly | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

(III) Lifestyle Attitudes

How do you feel about the following statements on lifestyle attitudes? (Please circle the number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with the statements as

follows: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| 1. | Abortion is never an option for Christians | | | | | | | | |
| 2. | Celibate homosexuals may be accepted into the church | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 3. | Pre-marital sex is not wrong if there is real love | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 4. | Masturbation is not a problem provided it is private and secret | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 5. | Pre-marital sex is not wrong if the couple has been engaged | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 6. | Pre-marital sex is not wrong if there is no pregnancy | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 7. | Marriage is an obligation if the girl is pregnant for the boy | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 8. | The only problem with unprotected sex is HIV and AIDS | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 9. | It's okay for a girl to sleep in the same house as her boyfriend | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 10. | It's okay for a couple to live together before marriage | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 11. | Okay for two young persons to indulge in heavy petting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 12. | Young people indulged in sex encouraged to get married | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |

(IV) Factors Affecting the Health of Family Relationships

How do you rate the following influences affecting the health of family relationships in your church? (Please circle the number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with the statements as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

- | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. | Exposure to the internet | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 2. | Tourism industry | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 3. | Use of mobile phones | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 4. | Our tropical climate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 5. | Movies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 6. | Late night activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 7. | Night clubs and discotheques | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 8. | Illegal drugs and alcohol | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 9. | Frequent overseas travel | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 10. | Lack of proper education | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 11. | End time conditions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 12. | Negligence of parents | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 13. | Peer pressure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 14. | Social culture in parties | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 15. | Continuous at risk behaviors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 16. | Low moral values | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 17. | Bad role models | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 18. | Rebellious attitudes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 19. | High exposure to temptations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 20. | Busy parents | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |

(V) Sexual Related Disorders

How do you evaluate the gravity of these problems in your church? (Please circle the number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with the statements as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Adultery | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 2. | Pre-marital sex | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Unfaithfulness of the spouse | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 4. | Living together without being married | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5. Sexually Active adolescents	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Abortion	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Marital conflict		1	2	3	4	5
8. Divorce	1	2	3	4	5	
9. Homosexuality		1	2	3	4	5
10. Pornography		1	2	3	4	5
11. Physical Abuse	1	2	3	4	5	
12. Emotional and Verbal Abuse		1	2	3	4	5
13. Sexual Abuse or Incest	1	2	3	4	5	

(VI) Rating the Priority of Needs

How do you rate for needs of the following programs in your church to improve strong family units? (Please circle the number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with the statements as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree.)

1. Pre-marital counseling or education	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Marriage strengthening programs	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Marriage renewal programs	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Parenting education	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Sex education		1	2	3	4	5
6. Singles ministry	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Couple's Club		1	2	3	4	5
8. Men's Club	1	2	3	4	5	
9. Communication skills seminar		1	2	3	4	5
10. Divorce recovery programs	1	2	3	4	5	
11. Family conflict management seminar		1	2	3	4	5
12. Grief recovery programs	1	2	3	4	5	
13. Addiction recovery support groups	1	2	3	4	5	
14. Referral list of Christian family counselors	1	2	3	4	5	
15. Family counseling centre	1	2	3	4	5	
16. Training in moral decision-making	1	2	3	4	5	
17. Training in Biblical Christian values	1	2	3	4	5	
18. Need of Family Ministries Director	1	2	3	4	5	
19. Need of Family Ministries Committee		1	2	3	4	5

(VII) Rating Of Premarital Counseling Topics

Please rate the following topics in order of priority from 1 being the most important and 20 to be the least important.

- 1. Communication Skills _____
- 2. Conflict Resolution _____
- 3. Courtship _____
- 4. The Role of In-Laws _____
- 5. Work and Career _____
- 6. Christian Stewardship _____
- 7. Love Commitment _____
- 8. Church, Religion and God _____
- 9. Social Activities _____
- 10. Roles of Spouses _____
- 11. Spiritual Growth _____
- 12. Family Budget _____
- 13. Relationship with Friends _____
- 14. Family Worship _____

- 15. Birth Control _____
- 16. Sexual Intimacy and Faithfulness _____
- 17. Divorce _____
- 18. The Wedding Ceremony _____
- 19. Forgiveness _____
- 20. Family Crisis _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**SEYCHELLES SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. For how long have you been married?
2. Do you have an Adventist Heritage? YES / NO
3. Did you follow marital counseling before getting married? YES / NO
4. For how long did you follow the counseling (for those who answered yes in #3 above)?
5. What were the five most important lessons that you learnt during your counseling sessions?
6. What do you think are the ten most important topics to be learnt before getting married?
7. Did you have children before getting married? YES / NO
8. Are you involved in the Couples' related activities of the church? YES / NO
9. How often do you spend time in prayer and Bible study with your spouse?
10. Do you go to church regularly with your spouse? YES / NO
11. Do you plan to spend vacation together every year? YES / NO
12. Do you celebrate your wedding anniversary every year? YES / NO
13. How do you evaluate your marital relationship at this moment?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Perfect	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Very Good	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Average	_____

<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure	_____
14. What do you think are the main factors of Couples' conflicts today?
15. What are the activities that will enhance strong Couples' relationship in your local church?
16. How can you personally help other couples in your church?

17. What are your recommendations for leadership towards couples of your church?

APPENDIX D

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN QUESTIONNAIRE

SEYCHELLES SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN QUESTIONNAIRE

- **Abortion:** expulsion of a fetus from the womb before it is viable
- **Addiction:** the condition of repeating a habit without the ability of stopping the behavior.
- **Adolescent:** a person in his/her teens (13-19 years old).
- **AIDS:** (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a disease in which there is a severe loss of the body's cellular immunity, greatly lowering the resistance to infection and malignance.
- **At-risk behaviors:** Getting involved in activities such as premarital sex, illicit drugs and drinking of alcoholic beverages.
- **Barren:** the inability to bear children, infertility in either male or female.
- **Case:** An objective description of a pastoral situation or relationship about which theological reflection will be done.
- **Case Study:** the process of pastoral-theological reflection about a given case. Based on the original case, it analyzes, reflects, theologizes, and prescribes action.

- **Common law relationship:** A man and a women living together without being legally married.
- **Divorce:** legal separation of a married couple putting an end to married relationship.
- **Heavy petting:** two persons indulging in caressing, kissing in a manner to arouse strong desire for sexual intercourse.
- **Homosexual:** A person who has an emotional and physical attraction to the same sex.
- **Incest:** sexual intercourse between persons too closely related to marry legally.
- **Intimacy:** the state or fact of being intimate, close to someone emotionally.
- **Marital Status:** the fact whether the individual is single, married, divorced or widowed.
- **Masturbation:** Stimulation of the genital organ without intercourse
- **Newlywed:** Just married
- **Pornography:** writings, pictures, etc. intended to arouse sexual desire.
- **Repudiation:** the putting away of a spouse.
- **Singles:** unmarried men or women

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VITA

Personal Details

Name	Georges, Michael, James BIJOUX
Gender	Male
Date of Birth	Thursday 14 th August 1969
Citizenship	Seychelles
Spoken Languages	English, French, Creole
Family Status	Married to Veronique, Lucinda BIJOUX on 8 th December 1991 Children: Jemima (F), Milcah (F), Peninnah (F) and Mikelah (F)
Physical Address	Beau Bel Estate, Bel Ombre, Mahé, SEYCHELLES.
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1992-1995	BA in Theology, AUCA-Mudende, Rwanda and IAS-FRANCE
1992	Certificate of Zaire Exam, General Pedagogy Section – Kigali, RWANDA
1990-1991	Certificate in Education – Diploma Part 1, Seychelles Polytechnic
1988-1989	Advanced Level Certificate in Mathematics, Chemistry + Physics - Seychelles Polytechnic
1987	Ordinary Level Certificate in Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, English Language and French Language – Seychelles Polytechnic
1985-1986	National Youth Service Ste. Anne I and Cap Ternay - SEYCHELLES
1982-1985	Secondary School at La Rosière, Anse Boileau and Belonie Schools, SEYCHELLE
1975-1981	Primary School at Belonie and La Rosière Schools, Mahé - SEYCHELLES

Duties and Responsibilities

2004-2009	President of Seventh-day Adventist Mission, SEYCHELLES
2002-2003	Praslin-La Digue District Pastor, Departmental Director, SEYCHELES MISSION
2002	Associate Treasurer, Seychelles Mission of SDA Church
1999-2001	Central Mahé District Pastor - SEYCHELLES
1996-1998	Southern Mahé District Pastor - SEYCHELLES
1995-1996	Internship at North-Central District of Mahé – SEYCHELLES